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THE SAVAGE SWARM—Spawned In Horror To Feast On Beauty

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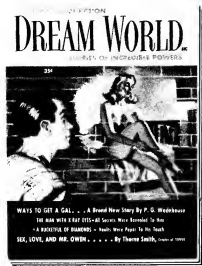
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BY THE EDITOR

THE EDITOR GETS SOME SLEEP . . .

• One-thirty a.m. . . . hmmm . . . fine time to be getting to bed . . . got the issue out, though . . . almost missed the deadline but we made it . . . I'll be asleep in sixty seconds and I won't wake up 'til Thursday . . . or Friday . . . nothing to worry about until next month . . . Man! . . . I'm half asleep already . . . Hmmm . . . it was a pretty darn good issue . . . that cover's a real eye-stopper . . . terrific lead story too . . . that Ellison can drive an editor nuts but the guy can sure write . . . Hmmm . . . wonder if they'll like that title . . . *The Savage Swarm* . . . sure they will . . . the serial's certainly going over with a bang . . . and wait 'til they read Silverberg's *Cosmic Kill* starting in the next issue . . . hey, cut it out, chum . . . you just finished the last issue and you're getting some sleep, remember . . . sure, lots of time on the next one . . . a whole month . . . Hmmm . . . first thing tomorrow I'll have to check with the printer on next month's lead . . . *The Man Who Collected Women* . . . Good title . . . Randy Garrett really did a job on the yarn . . . knockout cover, too . . . that poor gal being hauled right up off the street . . . not even time to phone home for more clothes . . . oh, well, where she's going she won't need 'em . . . look, will you cut it out and go to sleep . . . you're exhausted, remember . . . sure, sure . . . good old shut-eye . . . the March *Amazing's* out and all's right with the world . . . but that April issue . . . terrific is hardly the word . . . Hmmm . . . you know, it's darned nice of readers to write in and tell an editor what they like in an issue . . . and what they don't like, too . . . Hmmm . . . two-thirty . . . gotta get some sleep . . . wonder where I put those sleeping tablets . . .

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THE SAVAGE SWARM

By HARLAN ELLISON

Mathou was a nice little guy. He didn't want to bring chaos and destruction on the world. He only wanted to help humanity and be remembered as a benefactor. But good intentions aren't enough. Perhaps he realized that in his final agony.

MY NAME is Simon Belkin, and up till three weeks ago I had never killed a man. By trade I'm a research chemist, and now that it's all over, I find a dry, rotten taste left from the whole catastrophe. I have been asked to set this down, so it may be read into the Congressional Record; so that there will be a permanent record of what happened, and so that nothing like it can ever happen again.

They have asked me to do this, because I was as close to Franklyn Mathou as any man ever could be. I knew him while he worked at Kessler

salvation—or its doom.

Electronics, and I moved with him when he went into the government's Fairchild Desert Project. I knew of his experiments . . . indeed I helped him during the preliminary stages, before I knew what was happening to the nature of them, and to Mathou's mind.

More than that. I suppose the reason I have been chosen to chronicle Mathou's story is that I was the first man officially contacted by the authorities when the Horde began to appear.

But if I am to tell this story . . . as it really was; as it was felt; and as it was formed . . . then I must tell it my own way. And if it seems clumsy, and if it seems overlong, with data and personal history that need not have been included, I ask only that you bear with me, and realize this story deals with Mathou. Mathou, who was not a madman—as many have labeled him in retrospect—nor a conqueror, nor even a power-driven psychopath. This story is about Franklyn Mathou, who was a small man, with a hair-lip, and a bald head, and a bit of a belly; a small man who desperately wanted to be a big man, and who took the only means at his command, final-

ly, to show the world he *was* a big man.

It is a tragedy that God in his infinite wisdom has chosen some men to walk in the light of greatness, and others to suffer the tortures of infamy and defeat. For I believe, as God is my witness, that Franklyn Mathou—had he been formed as the rest of us, had Fate given him anything but the short end of the string—would have been a greater man than Lincoln, Einstein or Schweitzer.

I believe Franklyn Mathou would have created a golden age, with his bare hands and with the fantastic powers of his sick mind. That *might* have been, but was not.

Instead, I will tell the story of a man who brought death and horror to the world. In a thirteen week period the historians are already calling The Days of the Savage Horde.

But I will tell it my own way, so it cannot be distorted by time or memory.

For this is the way it happened.

The first time I saw Mathou he was in the Pink Gnome, which is a ridiculously-titled bar across the street from the towering fifty-story pylon of Kessler Electronics

in Detroit. He was sitting on the next bar stool as I came in, and I noticed him immediately.

First, because it was the middle of the afternoon and the bar was empty but for the two of us and the bartender, a taciturn Greek named Papayanoupoulous.

Second, because he was hooting drunk.

I had come in for my usual afternoon brain-quickener, which is my weak excuse for staving off what I'm certain would be incurable alcoholism if I didn't take a short shot each day about three o'clock. But what was this fellow doing there? It somehow seemed sacrilegious—even from *my* weakly-elevated position of observation—for a normal human to drink at that hour. So damnably in-betweenish. But he seemed to be propelling himself along the road to oblivion with admirable intent.

He had lined up the empty glasses as he polished them off, and the total was somewhere above fifteen. Papy was wiping the backbar mirror with a crumpled bit of moist newspaper, to avoid streaks, and watching the drunk with fiery Greek eyes. I wondered why he let him stay there so long in that

state; Papy was usually pretty careful about such things.

I sat down next to the drunk . . . and to this day I'll never know why *that* stool instead of the dozens of others . . . and keeping a wary eye on him, spoke to Papy.

"My usual, Papy."

The drunk didn't turn then, but kept running his tongue around the rim of the latest glass. As though trying to work it for the full measure of residue.

Papy poured me my martini without the use of a jigger, the way I like it, with an atomizer-squeeze of vermouth, and set it down in front of me. He tipped his head at the drunk, gave me a warning waggle of the handlebar mustache, and rolled his eyes as if to say there was no justice in Heaven or Earth.

Why don't you get rid of him? I asked with silent lips, exaggerating the words so he'd catch them. He shook his head in that particular way that meant he just *couldn't*, and went back to the bar mirror. I went back to my martini.

Then, and I suppose it was inevitable, the drunk turned to me.

"You know," he began thickly, but with hardly any slurring, "I heard two old women on the bus this mornin', and you know what they were sayin'?"

I stared at him. Then that damned inquisitive streak in me leaped up, and instead of ignoring him, I asked, "No, *what* did they say?"

He was an older man, in his early fifties, with an almost bald head, and a baker's dozen strands of shaggy brownish-white hair combed back to conceal what little of the skin they could. That should have been an indication of the fellow's temperament, but I didn't catch it right away. Not then, I didn't. He had soft, collie-brown eyes, that seemed ever so mournful and pleading, and a hair-lip that wasn't noticeable till he tried to speak, and you caught the very faintest of nasal twangs. His ears were set low, and gave him an extraordinary big-domed appearance. He was short . . . his feet didn't reach the stool foot-rest, and with his jacket and vest open, I could see the domelike bulge of a belly.

He seemed harmless as a field-mouse.

Wrong, wrong, wrong!

God, how could I be so wrong?

He went on, pointing out vital parts in the story with a finger stuck against his nose, "This first one—an' I *quote*—said to the other one, 'Ya see this han'bag I got here? I bought it at Slattery's. See the flat bottom and the little change-purse in here, and the double-stitch-in'? Well, it cost me,' and then she *whispered* the next, real loud, as if it were some important secret, 'one dollar an' *ninety-five* cents. They're sellin' the same thing all around town for three ninety-eight.'

"Then she went on, would you honest to goodness accept it, she went on to rave, I mean really *rave* about savin' that lousy two bucks!

"Now I ask you," he said intently, peering at me as through a fog of chicken noodle soup, "what the hell good are people, when the most important thing to them is savin' two stinkin' bucks on an old purse? What good can they be, when all they want are bargains, and don't care about the world, or advancement of science, or, or . . . or *anything*?"

Then he subsided into a cough and a hiccup, slipped off the stool, laid down a

twenty dollar bill, and clapped me on the shoulder.

"See ya aroun'."

And he was gone. Out the door, and out of sight, wavering greatly. I signaled to Papy.

"Who's that?"

The Greek crooked up one corner of his wide mouth ruefully, and replied, "His name's Mathou. He works over there, same place you do. Kessler; says he's an experimental something-or-other. I don't know."

I polished away the rest of the heavy martini, and two-fingered a dollar bill onto the bar. As Papy was getting me my change, I yelled after him, "What's *his* beef? Why the big drunk?"

Papy shrugged his shoulders again, tossed a few coins beside the empty cocktail glass. "Something or other about not getting the money he needed for some crazy experiment."

I nodded understandingly, having gone through the same thing a few months earlier; I'd wanted a wallop of cash to build some equipment for testing the effects of sub-zero climate on insects, but Kessler Electronics had pointedly reminded me their job was improving army tele-

metering devices, not fooling around with grasshoppers. I'd been shattered, and almost gone off on a toot myself, so I could see how this little Mathou character could do it easily.

I sighed as though that ended the conversation, and got up to go back to my bench at Kessler. I was halfway through the door, when Papy stopped me.

"Hey!" he said. I turned around and he had a peculiar expression on his face.

"Yeah?"

He looked at me thoughtfully for a second then inquired, "What's a pro-proto—uh—protoceratops?"

I walked back to the bar and stared at him. Papy came over from Greece twenty-four years ago, and his chief interest was in learning English well enough to curse out the umpires at a Detroit Tigers game without an impeding accent. What he was doing with the name of a prehistoric reptile seemed peculiar.

"A protoceratops?" I asked again, and he nodded. "Well, it was a lizard of the Jurassic period before man. Why?"

He scratched at his thick mustache with one finger, and asked, "Could you hold one in your hands?"

"Huh?"

"I said . . . could you hold one in your hands?"

I arched my eyebrows, because I couldn't think of anything else to do, and answered, "Well, yeah, I suppose so . . . if it was a baby. They were about the size of a full-grown cat when they were born. Why?"

He still had that damned perplexed expression on his face, and he shot back at me, "Because that Mathou said even the protoceratops would not convince them to give him the appropriation.

"Said he carried the damned thing in and *showed* it to them, but they laughed at him."

I stared at Papy for a minute, figured there wasn't anything halfway intelligent I could say to that, so I turned around again and walked back across the street to Kessler Electronics.

I didn't do much work that afternoon. Not much at all.

The next time I saw Mathou, we were formally introduced, and I learned how tormented he was, how he'd *always* been tormented. It was only three weeks later—that was, I believe, in late July of 1953—and our meeting was by the strictest vagaries of chance.

I was in the free pool that day. Kessler Electronics had developed a beautiful system for keeping the labs and projects completely staffed, without hiring more men than they needed: they had developed the "pool" where technicians who were not actively engaged in something were sent to wait an assignment. None of us were ever there for more than an hour, for there was always a beaker that needed watching, or a mercury switch that needed installing in some rig. But on that muggy July day there were eight of us in the "ready room" of the fifth floor, and we had started an impromptu poker game, with pasteboards furnished at a low rate from Old Willie, the janitor.

I was about to collect a juicy pot, when the swinging doors eyed open, and the little man from the bar, hare-lip and all, burst in; almost before the electric eye could swing the doors. He stormed into the room, and screamed, "I need a man! I need a man! Who's had the most wave-quotient differential background? Who? Who? Quick, quick, quick!"

He looked like a rabbit on a frying pan, jumping up and down, and bellowing at the top of his scratchy voice, and

most of them just stared in amazement. I heard one of the boys mumble absently, "Oh, hell, it's just that screwy Mathou, from the nineteenth."

Mathou was going round and round the table, slapping it with his palms, and bel-lowing for a wave man. Like a damned fool I muttered at him as he went past, "I've had six years quantitative, and two more curve-progression, if you can wait about a minute and a half."

I started to lay down my hand, and rake in all that many-weeks' wages, when he slapped the cards from my hands, and *literally* dragged me out of my chair, and through the doors, down the hall . . . before I could get enough air into my lungs to yell at him to stop.

For a little guy he was crawling with strength.

"The pot! The pot, you damned fool!" I shouted at him, halfway to the escalator, slapping *his* hands off *me*. "You made me lose close to three hundred bucks!"

He stopped dead in his tracks, and his eyes frosted over with a hell-shine that dared me to utter another sound; he wasn't fooling around; he was seething inside.

"You stupid bum," he spat at me. "Don't you ever let me hear you offer an excuse like that again. This is a matter of *science* and anything else is waste. Do you hear me? Waste!"

He turned and snapped back over his shoulder, "Come on, quickly! I need you to siphon!"

Then he was bolting for the escalator, and we were riding up. He didn't even bother to wait for it to carry us up. He took the escalator stairs two steps at a time, and damned if I wasn't out-puffing him by the time we got to the nineteenth. He was in his fifties, and I was thirty-one, and the old boy had me lung-wise by about twenty years. However, as we passed the eleventh and twelfth, I managed to get my formal introduction.

"Y - your n - name? Wh-wha's y-your n-name . . . for my r-report of ac-ac-activity?" I managed to gasp out, and he answered, sweet as you please, steady and unflut-tered . . .

"Mathou. Franklyn Mathou. Hurry. I've brought it back. The air from the past. Hurry."

That was my second meeting with Mathou. I had no

idea what would come of it. I had no idea I'd be spending the better part of seven years either with him . . . or looking for him, to kill him.

He had the place so clean you could actually have eaten off the floor. Now I don't know whether you've ever stopped to consider what that means, but what it meant in *this* case was that it was so utterly clean he made me take off my shoes before I entered the lab.

He was using the old hydroponics experimentation room, which had been abandoned some time back for refurnishing, and had cleared and cleaned it himself. The walls were a dazzling white; so white they must have been painted over and over the whiteness beneath. The floor was cleared, and he had the workbenches set into two of the walls, in a way that they could be folded up and snapped flat against the wall. The entire floor was occupied by the strangest, weirdest, most unbelievable maelstrom of mechanics imaginable. I saw rector coils and leyden jars, and banks upon banks of vacuum tubes; there were bladder pumps and expulsion pumps, circuit hookups and beaded weight rods of carbo-

rundum. The entire mass was encased in a half globe that rested on the floor, held steady against swaying by girders that bolted it to the floor. The mass of equipment rose up out of the globe like garbage from a soup bowl, and there was a stage cleared from *that*, rising on four pillars that were really neon tubes. The stage was an enclosed bubble, with a floor three-quarters of the way to the bottom, and a hose attachment for a suction pump. The kind used to draw air out of an enclosure. There was a stick-tight door with a rubber mouthing around it in the bubble.

I stared at the mess.

It was pulsing.

Pulsing, so help me, as though the thing were alive, and was taking deep breath after deep breath. As though it was sucking air from somewhere. And it was. I snapped a quick look at a density counter in the mess of dials, and saw that the bubble was, indeed, filling with air. And more.

Shapes were forming hazily inside that bubble. The air thickened, by the dial, and as it did, the *innerness* of the bubble, if that is the right word, bulked out.

I watched silently for a mo-

ment, then realized Mathou had double-bolted the door, and was urging me toward a face of knife-switches. "Throw these in sequence, when I tell you," he snapped sharply. "One each time I yell."

I nodded, and put my hand on the first one.

Mathou scurried about the half-globe, adjusting this, turning that, setting something else to moving. Then: "Throw number one!"

I flipped the knife-switch down, and a muted buzzing erupted from the machine. "Two!" and the second one went down. I threw fifteen in all, and as the last one sliced home, the shape in the bubble took solidity, and I saw it was a piece of land.

But *what* a piece of land!

It was swamp, with the most unbelievable ferns and bracken I've ever seen. A million unnameable bugs skittered about over the surface of the slimey water, and I thought I saw a sleek, olive green lizard slip through the muck.

It was a piece of land straight out of the Jurassic. Or a dawn age coal forest. It was either that or the most clever reproduction imaginable.

Then the lizard crawled up

out of the slime, and I knew it was no fake; that thing was alive . . . a thing that had been extinct on Earth for more millions of years than I cared to consider. Alive, here in a laboratory in the heart of Detroit, in the year 1953. It was unbelievable. Somehow, and I *couldn't* doubt it, since it was before my eyes, Franklyn Mathou had figured a way to reach into the past, and bring the very Earth forward in time.

Then it dawned on me completely . . .

Mathou had invented a *time machine*!

I started toward the suction-sealed door in the bubble, ready to grab that lizard out of there, aware how valuable it would be to paleontologists. Mathou's scratchy voice stopped me halfway across the floor.

"No, you fool! Ignore that flotsam. We can get it any time, *any time*! Help me with this suction pump . . . we've got to evacuate that air."

He indicated a row of steel-jacketed tanks I hadn't seen before, since the ten of them were lined up under one of the workbenches, in shadow. They were all marked in chalk:

EVACUATED OF AIR

and Mathou was already working over the pump in the bubble's wall, attaching one end of the mechanism to the first bottle, studying the gauge on the bottle as to how full it was going to get.

Then he motioned to me. I walked over quickly, caught up by the strangeness and wonder of what was happening.

He directed me to start the pump, while he watched the bottle. I pushed the button, and the density gauge immediately fell a few lines. "It's filling," he chuckled from behind me, and I turned to see he'd opened the valve on the bottle, was filling it with the air from inside the bubble.

We stood there for over an hour, filling all ten of the bottles, and getting two more from the storage vaults on the nineteenth floor, evacuating them, and filling them with the air from the past.

As we stood, we talked.

I found out Mathou had been working on this time machine in his spare hours; that he had invented it from the floor up, with only basic principles for the formation of certain segments contributed by other scientists. In an era where authentic individual research has yielded

up hardly nothing, and group inventiveness is the keynote, Franklyn Mathou had done the impossible: he had invented something totally new, using new principles of space and matter, by himself!

And even as I spoke to him, he was searching out his bottle of whiskey. He found it shoved behind a box of coils and wires, and uncorked it with his teeth, one hand on the bottle gauge that indicated the air from the past was filling fast.

If I had thought Mathou merely a strange little man with a bad drunk on, before, now I had to re-evaluate him seriously. He was much more. He was a deeply-troubled man, with a sincere desire to succeed, and an overwhelming desire to show the world he was more than a hare-lipped, little man.

"My wife left me three years ago," he said, after having tilted the bottle into his mouth for one of the longest swigs of alcohol I'd ever seen. "Just like out of a bad confession magazine. Took the baby with her—Rosalind was her name; the baby I mean—and I had to contest it in court. She won; they said I drank too much even then."

He chuckled again, half to

himself, and tilted the bottle up again. "They'd laugh if they could see me now!"

Then his face began to glow with an inner satisfaction, and I felt my hand go rigid on the suction pump, still creating a vacuum in that bubble. "But when I've finished the experiments . . . no one will doubt my capabilities."

He seemed so intent, so *driven*, I felt a shiver go up my back almost. He wasn't mad, that was certain, but there is a point where even intensity becomes obsession, and at that point I imagine any man is mad. Franklyn Mathou had long since passed the point of mere obsession.

When the bubble was evacuated, and vacuum within, he turned the screw on the last air bottle, and unhooked the pump mechanism.

Then he walked to my knife-switch board . . . and calmly, as he knew what he was doing, threw every one of them back. The land area, the ferns, the pre-history swamp, the lizard so valuable to science, all flicked out of existence.

"What have you done?" I screamed, leaping at him, so sick at what he had done that my mind filmed over with

rage. "What have you done? You've just robbed science of more research material than they have been able to dig out themselves in three hundred years! Are you crazy?"

Mathou fell back, and warded me off nervously.

He stared at me oddly for an instant, then a smile broke fitfully on his lips; "Don't worry about that. We can bring back the past at any time with the curve-wave generator. What's important now is the *air*, my boy! The air!"

"What did you say your name was?"

I stared at him, sure now that he was insane in many ways, but I heard myself answering, "Belkin. Simon Belkin." And I couldn't help liking Mathou.

He took me by the arm, and we walked away from the big generator. As we passed the control board he flicked a switch, and the pulsing died in the machine. It was silent, but I knew it could draw up the past any time Mathou commanded it.

"Belkin. Mr. Belkin, how would you like to be my assistant? You are the first one I've used around this den of idiocy, who has had the slightest interest in *true sci-*

entific endeavor. True, you looked at the wrong aspect of it, but just the same that was from ignorance of the situation, not through malice.

"I'm about to do some marvelous things here, Mr. Belkin, and if you wish to work with me . . . then I'll arrange it.

"My word may not carry much around this rat's nest . . . Lord knows I have to beg for every dollar to improve the generator, and then when I *do* bring them incontrovertible proof, they laugh it away as fakery . . . but I'm sure they'd rather give me a new assistant than the money I need." He snarled in annoyance, and killed the bottle of whiskey.

I was amazed to see how much he could drink, and still not totter. His immunity to alcohol must have been fantastic in the extreme.

Again, without realizing why, he asked, "Well, would you like to work with me? No one but the Board of Directors knows of this machine, and they refuse to believe in it. What say?" I found myself answering, "I'd like that very much, Dr. Mathou."

"Then come with me," he indicated with a wave of the bottle and his hand. I follow-

ed him, helping him lift one of the heavy steel-jacketed air bottles we had just filled. We carried it down the hall, and into another old lab room.

He had fitted this one up with a breather rig, so that each of the hundred cages on the wall—sealed behind glass—could be fed the air from the past, without pollution from other air.

He screwed the bottle into the rig, and started feeding the air through into ten cages, marked with tags. He pumped out the air already in the cages at an even rate, as the new air was pumped in.

I looked into the cages.

Insects.

Hundreds of thousands of insects. Beetles, ants, ladybugs, praying mantises, grasshoppers, centipedes, aphids and dragonflies. The cages were honeycombed with nests, and the bugs existed side-by-side, in seeming harmony.

"What are you doing with them, Dr.," I asked in bewilderment, seeing no connection between the air and these bugs.

"I have always been interested in cell mutation," he explained quickly, "and when I first stumbled upon the key theorem for the generator, I

concentrated merely on bringing forward bits of the past.

"But one day I discovered an insect flitting about in the air within the bubble . . ." he walked to a shelf and took down what looked like a plastic block, about three feet wide by four feet high, "... and I captured it. Look."

I looked and saw a strange, long-legged, pincered insect of some unnamed kind, frozen in the plastic. He was three and a half feet tall. The largest insect I'd ever seen.

"So my first interest in entomology sprang up, and I began experimenting." Mathou was warming to his topic, and his face had that same grim inner glow that had chilled me so much in the generator room.

He continued. "I performed every kind of experiment possible, to discover why that mantis-like insect—now completely gone from the Earth, and not even hinted at in our entomological theories—was so huge, and why contemporary insects are so small.

"Finally, I found out the secret. It was the air."

I must have looked totally amazed, for he grinned up at me in the first expression of ease I had seen on his pudgy face. He was a nervous man by nature, and a frightened

one most of the time—which was why he drank—but he seemed somehow at ease with me. "The air?" I asked incredulously.

He nodded. "That's right. There was a hyperactive germ in the air, created perhaps by a momentary—cosmically speaking, of course—altering of the structure of the sun's rays. There is almost uniform agreement among scientists, that the atmosphere of the Earth has changed radically, in the past several billion years, and somewhere along the line, the atmosphere was just right for this short-lived change in the rays, which created the germ, which induced growth in insects.

"They were doomed to short lives, however, for the germ disappeared in perhaps a thousand, two thousand years. And they were not constructed for long life anyhow. They hardly have any stomachs in comparison to the body size, and they were clumsy, once they had been mutated to that great size.

"So they disappeared. But think what a discovery it would be, if I could find out specifically *what* it was that made those insects get larger, and then isolate it, break it

down, apply it to human growth . . . perhaps even longevity!"

He went on at great length, getting more and more enthused about the research he was doing. It was fantastic, and unbelievable, but I held the plastic block with its three and a half foot long mantis in it, and I knew he had something valuable here. Thus far he had not worked the air mixture in just the right way, cutting and sending it through just exactly right, for anything startling to happen, but he had seen decided growth in several types.

He was anxious to continue. His enthusiasm had rubbed off on me.

I went to work with Franklyn Mathou.

We found each other compatible, and soon I had subtly cut him down on his drinking, started to regulate his sleeping hours, and in a very short time, we were the best of good friends.

In late 1954, Mathou was dismissed from Kessler Electronics, and he smashed the wave-curve generator.

They labeled it "private interests" and said he had been neglecting his Kessler projects. What they actually

meant was that he had not devoted himself robotically to turning out a million insignificant little commercial trinkets by working in a group, as the other Kessler men did. That he was not paying his way.

All he had done was make the most significant stride forward of any scientist in the past hundred years. That was as nothing to them. For they refused staunchly to believe in time travel . . . even of this aborted form. And every time he asked for more money, they refused, warning him.

Finally they let him go.

We both accepted Mathou's dismissal.

I quit the same hour he did. In his eyes, was an expression I will never forget. Mathou was more than grateful. I believe—I *truly* believe—I was the first real friend the man ever had.

We both accepted positions with the government's Fairchild Desert project. Research on the C-bomb.

We worked together there from December of 1954 to March of 1957 when he was dismissed again. This time they trumped up the "security risk" alibi. It was a fraud, and everybody knew it. I was kept on. They were

glad when he was gone, because his experiments had begun to take shape. In my spare time, when I wasn't directly concerned with the C-bomb experiments, I helped him.

I distinctly recall one evening in September of 1956, when Mathou came banging at my prefab's door, hastening me to follow him back to the jury-rigged lab he'd constructed behind his own prefab.

I slipped into shoes and a jacket—against the late evening chill of the Nevada deserts—and followed him.

When we got to the lab, I could hear something beating fiercely against the walls. The sound of thumping got stronger and stronger and stronger, rising to an almost deafening tattoo, with the beats coming closer and closer

together. I made a move to enter the lab, but he held me back.

"In a minute, Simon, in a minute."

His face was glowing again, but even so he seemed terribly frightened. As though he had done something he was not quite certain would come out right. How could he know? How could I? How could anybody!

Finally, one momentous instant of utter noise, as the pace of beating rose to a crescendo, then there was a heavy plot-plop! as of something dropping to the floor, and Mathou said it was all right to go in.

I had difficulty shoving the door inward. There was something clogging the doorway. But I put all my six foot one and one hundred eight-five pounds behind it. The door inched open till I

COMFORT BY PROXY

To lessen childbirth pain, superstitious Alabamans still fold the husband's trousers and place them under the wife's back.



got a slitted view of the lab. It was a wreck. A monstrous wreck. Mathou had of course built a new wave-curve generator with the rich salary he was drawing down, and it was shattered beyond repair. Girders twisted, tubes shattered, the floor strewn with debris. I caught a glimpse of the walls. They had been battered almost through. Another moment, and whatever had caused that noise, would have leveled the lab completely.

"What . . . ?" I began, looking over my shoulder at Mathou.

Then I didn't bother to wait for an answer, because my half-asked question was answered. Horribly answered. I *saw* what had caused the ruin. It was lying on the floor, clogging the doorway. I shoved hard, and something in the body snapped, and the door slammed open against the inner wall. I stood there for a moment in a cold sweat of terror, staring at it, hardly believing my eyes, though I'd been working with Mathou and the air for the past four years.

It was his most successful operation of air-feeding to date. It was gigantic, almost twenty feet across the wing-spread, and the most brilliant colors I had ever seen.

"Caught it in the larva stage," Mathou said behind me, as though apologizing for something.

I couldn't answer. I just stared.

The butterfly was gigantically frightening.

After he was dismissed in March, I didn't see Mathou again till three weeks ago. But I knew of him. Not through 1957 or 1958. Those two years he was in hiding, living off what money he had saved at his jobs—which must have been considerable, since he never went out. He seldom bought new clothes, spent only for food, drink and research equipment—getting more bitter and frustrated with every passing day.

I can picture what he was going through, hidden away wherever he was on some obscure Florida key, or in the heart of the Patagonian jungle or wherever it was. His mind slowly twisted in on itself. All his life he had been rejected because he was short, and fat and hare-lipped. That can work on a man. Really work on him, to a frightening degree, till he becomes so warped the nature of his disease can never really be pinpointed.

That happened to Franklyn

Mathou. The fear of being ridiculed, or hunted down as a subversive . . . forced him to hide and work in secret.

His experiments assumed a single-minded purpose in his mind. No longer was he striving to prolong human life; what had humanity done for him?

Now he was only interested in the work itself. Bigger, longer-living insects. Bigger and bigger and bigger . . .

I heard the news first over the late evening television news, and refused to believe it. I suppose even then I knew who and what was behind it, but my mind blocked it off.

It was just thirteen weeks ago, April of 1959, that the Days of the Savage Horde began. The report said only that giant insects had been discovered in Detroit, Michigan. That they had wreaked havoc all across the city, destroying buildings just by smashing into them, turning carnivorous, wrecking communications hookups. The report was slightly hysterical, even second-hand, and the message almost garbled. I knew what it meant though. There was no joking attitude in the announcer's voice, as there would have been, had it been another silly season

hoax. This was the real thing.

Later reports verified the first, and the insects were said to be descending in hordes, gigantic winged and taloned monsters taller than the tallest buildings in the city.

Single reports told of an entire train crushed as one of the insects died and fell atop it.

Of a woman, sunbathing on her apartment building roof, grabbed up in the jaws of a praying mantis and dragged, screaming, into the slaver's jaws.

Of the entire Kessler Electronics building, almost leveled by concerted attack of two hundred foot tall plant aphids.

The situation was frantic, and it seemed they were getting thicker. Reports had it that the sky was black at noon with them, streaming in, laying eyes on the city, and falling to their destruction as though they were human.

Eggs were laid, and larvae began to grow into full-sized insects. A fantastic, unbelievable thing to happen in the middle of a quiet April day, just like any other April day . . . except death had descended from the skies on strange wings.

I got the call an hour after I heard the first report. I was the first man contacted, even though the TV had carried the story; that had been a fluke. One of the network's communications men had been on the scene when it had happened, and he had gotten out a message before Detroit went dead. He was cut off before he finished, and no further word went in or out of Detroit for thirteen weeks.

The bugs had taken over.

The F.B.I. called me, told me a limousine was on its way out to get me, arrived at the door two minutes later, and an hour later I was in a knotty-pine room *somewhere*. Don't ask me where, because I don't know; and even if I *could* say, I wouldn't.

Any government agency that could figure out Mathou was behind this attack of the insect hordes, from what little actual information they had to go on, was enough to frighten me into silence.

I was herded down a long hall, to an elevator. Up the elevator to another hall, back down that one to a door with

COL. P. G. CASSIDY

in neat block on a plastic plate, screwed to the wood.

The plainclothes F.B.I. man knocked three times, and a rough, heavy voice said, "*Come!*"

They opened the door, stepped back, and I walked in to meet Colonel Paul Cassidy.

He was an impressive man. Big in every respect; huge hands with wide, blocky fingers. Hair graying at the temples of a head that seemed so regal he should have been born a lion. A thin line of white mustache flecked his upper lip, setting off with white the snapping blue of his huge eyes.

He didn't waste any time. He was direct, and it made me more uncomfortable than I was already; I was sure they thought I was a subversive. I figured my job with the project was gone, and perhaps my freedom, too. It was a terse moment.

After he'd offered me a chair, Cassidy charged into the subject. "When was the last time you saw Franklyn Mathou?"

I knew that was coming, and I answered it rapidly. "In March of 1957 at the project. Not since."

"Not at all?"

"Not once. Not even a letter."

"You know he's behind this Detroit thing, don't you?"

I nodded. "I'd suspected as much."

He stared at me levelly. "Do you know that Pittsburgh, Columbus, Ohio, Cincinnati, Peoria and Chicago, Milwaukee and Buffalo, New York are all silent? Do you know that all shipping on the lower half of Lake Michigan and across the entire length of Lake Erie is stopped? Do you know that those . . . those . . . whatever they are have killed over a million people?"

I listened with growing horror.

Had it been a war, or a flood, that would have been something I could understand, but this was a new horror, and it was terribly frightening. A map hung on the wall behind Cassidy, and I saw a seven-sided figure joined by straight lines through the knocked-out cities—covering six states and part of Canada—that was cross-hatched in black. The Swarm area. The Horde had descended *en masse*, and in no more than five hours had cut off a gigantic section of the Midwest.

"How much do you love your country, Belkin?"

I stared him back. "Don't throw that at me, Colonel. I'm as good an American as

you, but I'm not a sentimentalist about it. This isn't Americanism or anything else, but humanity. If there's anything I can do, I'll do it."

His lips quirked at that.

"You don't have much choice, Belkin. You're the only man who *can* do it. We don't know where he is . . . lost him for good about two years ago. But we knew about his experiments; not how he was finding the means to do it, just what his results were."

I was surprised. I hadn't thought anyone knew about the wave-curve generator, and the air from the past. "Then why didn't you stop him?"

"That was the project's idea. They knew how much progress he had made on his own, under difficult circumstances; they wanted to let him continue that way, see how far he could get. Then when the right time came..."

I interrupted, "... when the right time came they'd step in and grab it, give him maybe a gold medal, and pat his po-po, saying, 'Go your merry way, Dr. Mathou, your suffering has not been in vain.' Yeah, I know what they'd say!" I was plenty mad.

Cassidy banged his heavy

hand on the desk, glared at me. "Oh, shut up, Belkin! Mathou filled your ear with so much damned self-pity, that you actually believe he had to suffer like that, don't you?"

He answered his own question. "Yes, I can see by your face you do. Well, he didn't! He *wanted* it that way. Every time he came to ask for help, he had already decided in his mind that he'd been turned down, and he was arrogant, pitiful. Yet every time he went back to work, he made more progress. He was driving himself, and it was wisest to let him continue that way.

"That was why he was dismissed from the project. He was nearing his goal. A sort of rejuvenation, or longevity treatment for aged people, and we wanted him to complete the work by himself. We were keeping tabs on him . . . but we lost him, unfortunately. This office has been devoted for the past five years to one person: Mathou. We've been on the lookout for him with everything we've got—which is a lot, I assure you—but he's been pretty nicely hidden."

"What do you want from me?"

I must have sounded pretty

belligerent, because he hit me with it all at once, without softening it.

"We want you to kill Mathou."

It took them thirteen weeks to find Mathou.

The Horde had spread. It now covered most of the Eastern United States, and couldn't be stopped. Everywhere they went, spawning as they flew, they darkened the sky with their shapes. The giant locust and the mantises were the worst. They were worse than the plagues of legend. Hundreds of feet tall, and deadly, they ate everything in sight, decimated the land, killed hundreds of thousands every day. People fled in terror, only to be caught and eaten. Each bug lived only a few hours, and many died just from the sheer weight of their bodies that their bone structure was unable to support.

But more and more and more came. A never-ending Horde of them, driving on, eating everything, leveling entire cities in hours.

They had not been able to find Franklyn Mathou before, because he could have been anywhere, and he had *wanted* to stay secluded. But now the insects were coming from *somewhere*, and they finally

traced them back, by following the track of eggs laid by the insects.

As giant ants crawled across the ruins of Memphis, Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee, F86F Cougar jets streaked back toward the Great Lakes, seeking the end of the trail, or the place where it met outgoing insect layings.

Finally they found it. One of the smallest of the Thousand Islands. They circled lower, sure they had located Mathou, ready to raze the island from end to end with napalm and even atom bombs if necessary. But he had gone.

They circled higher, avoiding the giant moths that tried to envelop their ships, and streaked away. He was gone.

Then, thirteen weeks after the frightening Days of the Savage Horde began, they located Mathou's new laboratory. He had taken over Manitoulin Island, jutting out into the middle of Lake Huron, a spit of land beyond Sault Ste. Marie.

He was there, encased in a lab that somehow the insects avoided, breeding more, feeding more the air from the past in just the right dose to make them grow, and lay giant eggs. There he was, and there they wanted me to go.

Cassidy called me in. I'd been on "ready" for thirteen weeks, sitting biting my fingernails down till the quick pained me every time I touched it. He called me in and told me I was being dropped by parachute onto the island, and I was to kill Mathou, no matter how difficult it was.

When you come right down to it, that was a pretty unreasonable attitude. But they were desperate enough to ask the impossible. Unfortunately, I was the poor slob who had to do it.

They had decided that Mathou was more dangerous alive than dead. They had decided his genius was perverted, wasted, useless. They had decided he must die, and the only man who had even a chance to get to him was his old friend, Simon Belkin.

I dressed in the knotty-pine room they had assigned me, and stared at my reflection in the mirror. My reflection zipped up the flying suit, and I saw my brown eyes, brown hair, nervous tongue flickering. *Belkin*, I thought to myself, *you're going to come out of this the short end, whether you win or lose. Kill Mathou or not.* I nodded my head in agreement, but what could I do?

I left the jet at 1:00 on Friday, June 16th. The sun was high in the sky, and the Lake was not too cold. The land was like black rot as far as I could see, and the parachute was white against the cloudless sky. I came down too slowly, the wind carrying me, luckily, over the land. I was attacked by dragonflies during the descent, but the sub-machine gun frightened them away. I blasted into their midst, and all it took was a grazing shot. Their bones were so brittle, they shattered on the impact. I began to think that if no more new bugs were loosed with the air in them, these would die off quickly; they just weren't born to be that size. A two inch ten-spot dragonfly to be blown up to ninety or a hundred feet was an impossibility the universe would tolerate only for a short time.

But I saw now, as the black rot land swept by under me, that Mathou had to die. He was now quite mad. What could he possibly want with an invasion like this? What could be his purpose? The land was worthless? Did he want to rule a land of death?

I got down safely, coming to rest in a field, with the chute dragging me twenty

feet before I could snap out of it.

I stood up, and suddenly realized I hadn't seen Mathou's lab on the way down. The weight of the portable flame-thrower on my back, and the heft of the sub-machine gun in my arms made me feel slightly ridiculous standing there.

Simon Belkin, a chemist, in a blackened field, with hundred foot ants and bugs all about, carrying enough armament for a small patrol, and looking for a little hare-lipped man with a pot belly. I wanted to cry, right then . . . more because of the futility and irony of it all, than anything else.

I struck out across the field, going inland, toward Sault Sainte Marie, a long way off.

The ants got to me twenty miles inland.

They came streaming across the ground, dying of hunger, for they snapped and chopped at each other, finding the land barren. They were monstrous, revolting. Their size was unbelievable. Even coming down through the air, with the dragonflies on me, I hadn't realized what Mathou had done to them; in the air anything looks smaller than it is. But these were fire ants,

usually about two-tenths of an inch long . . . now they were thirty to forty feet long. The little fire ants of the Southern states can sting nesting birds to death, I'd been told, but these . . . *these . . .*

The first wave spotted me, and I panicked. I tried to run. What a fool I was!

I got ten steps away, and they were almost on me.

I knew I had to stop, had to fight them with what I had. I brought up the machine gun, sprayed the first wave. They kept coming. A few had gotten hit, but most of them had been protected. I fired again, a longer burst, stopping more, killing more, as many as I could. There was no place to run.

That stopped them for a few seconds: food!

They tumbled over one another, their pincers clacking terribly. I saw one ant lifted bodily by three others struggling for his meat, and throw him in a cloud of dirt and dust. The sound of them was like a million knitting needles, miles high, clicking all at once. Their sounds were more than pincer on pincer, though. They had screams. And they screamed and screamed and screamed till I

felt the nerves in my back teeth begin to ache from the way I was grinding my jaws together.

An ant's head, five feet long, flew out of the fight, and two ants were on it at once.

I didn't wait any longer. I unsnapped the hose from the flame thrower, and turned the valve slowly on one of the eight thin tubes strapped to my back. The thing was ready. I waited an instant, and then—that quickly—all the meat from the killing before was gone, and they were ready for me. I jumped back a few feet to give me a wider angle of spray, and let loose. I turned the nozzle on the hose to full flow, and snapped down the button. The chemicals met in twin streams a fraction of an inch from the mouth of the hose, and in a moment there was a broiling, burning wall of flame between me and the ants.

They tried to get through, damn them!

They piled charred corpse on charred corpse, and they just kept coming, like a red sea of death. I had to keep moving back, and in a while my face was coated with the black soot of my own fire. I was beginning to worry about my tank supply, and

wondering how many hours I had been burning them down and where they were coming from and what I was going to do and whether or not I could just lie down and die and have them eat me without any more trouble and then, suddenly . . .

They were gone.

All gone.

Every one of them.

Dead, and stinking, in a burned swath of charred bodies that stretched around me for thirty feet. I blessed every God I knew, and thanked every hand that had loaded those chemical tanks on my back before I'd left.

Then I realized just how damned foolish it was to send one man into this. They really *were* desperate. They thought I was the only man who could get to Mathou, so they took the chance. If I failed, they were doomed, and they knew it.

I started off again. Only one flame thrower tank still filled. The machine gun swinging in wary arcs in my arms.

Scared? Hell, yes! Through and through.

I found the lab finally.

The roof had been set up like a funnel, and from that funnel I could hear the puff-puff-puff of air escaping.

The air. The air from the past.

So that was how he was doing it. Polluting the air—natural with just the right amount of air—past to produce the mutated, giant insects. The Savage Horde that had wiped out almost an entire continent.

It was quiet around the building. Too quiet, too damned deadly quiet. I wondered about that, and put my ear to the wall. The same wave-curve generator pulsing I'd heard so often before, that I'd heard that first time in the old hydroponics lab of Kessler Electronics, many centuries before. I knew it had to be, whatever was going to be.

I walked around the building, was about to open the door, when a long, slimey shadow slipped across me. I looked up.

The larvae of a mantis was emerging from the ground fifty feet away. The thing grew as I watched it, like some hideous beanstalk, all green and terrible eyes. I watched stunned as it rose up out of the ground—where the parent had laid the egg—and stumbled forward on pipe-stem legs.

I swung out the flame hose, and started to turn it on. The

thing lashed out with one razored foreleg, caught me on the shoulder, and ripped the flame thrower off its straps with one lucky movement.

I stood there, dripping blood from my shoulder, feeling the mantis poison spreading down through my body, and reached for the machine gun I had dropped.

The mantis was lowering its spade-shaped head, its senses telling it that hunger was upon it, and here was food!

I saw the antennae quiver, and the face nearing mine, and I tried to bring up the machine gun. It was tons heavy, and as the beast slavered at me, I fell backward, against the building. The shadow of it washed me in inkiness, and it kept coming forward, shamblingly, not hopping, for one hop would carry it forty feet away.

I struggled with the gun, brought it up only by sheer dint of strength left in me, and fired blindly.

The bullets sprayed out chatteringly, and I saw a haze of green as the beast caught the stream of slugs in the eye. The eye shattered and pulped, and the head flew apart into silent slipperiness. The beast careened forward and fell

sidewise, missing me with a razored hind-leg by an inch.

I lay against the building, panting, for five minutes.

There had still been no movement from inside the lab. Mathou was waiting quietly. Probably knew the assassination was at hand.

I turned and blew open the door with a short burst, kicked in the lab door with my foot.

The wave-curve generator had been set up to keep dragging air from the past in a steady stream, sending it through the filtering section, and right out the roof, in one continual stream. A constant stream of that mutating air, over and over, ever up and up and out and out. It was hideous.

I leveled the sub-machine gun, with what strength I had left, and blasted steadily for two minutes, seeing nothing around me but the machine splintering and shattering, and the sounds of the chattering, slug-spraying gun.

Then the pulsing died away as the bubble burst with a tremendous shattering of plastic and glass and nickel-steel.

The pulsing stopped, and the air stopped flowing.

Then I looked around.

I vomited. I was so sick I wanted to die. I went back outside, and somehow—don't ask me how—I managed to turn on the flame thrower the mantis had ripped off my back. I turned it on full force and sprayed the building from top to bottom. I watched as it caught, and I stumbled backwards and fell as the first blast of chemicals from inside hit me. I struggled to my hands and knees, having dropped the gun and the flame thrower, and crawled, God yes I *crawled*, away from that inferno.

The last thing I heard before the night washed away my sight and sound and smell was the percussive roar of the lab going up finally and completely, totally, in smoke and flame and the utter death of utter finality.

Mathou and his lab were both gone, would be gone for all time to come.

Then I sank into oblivion.

EPILOGUE

He had been killed by one of his own creations, oddly enough. He had been killed by the very ants and mantises he had loved and worked with. They had gotten loose in the lab somehow, and

gotten more of the air than they were supposed to have; test cases that they had been; controlled experiments.

They had gotten to Mathou, and though he had killed them with a crowbar, they hadn't left much of him either.

No one will ever know, I suppose, why he did it.

Whether he *was* mad, or whether it was revenge, or whether they just got out of hand, no one will know. As far as I'm concerned, he was sane, and had no knowledge of what his experiments were doing. But there are the historians who say otherwise. They have labeled it the Days of the Savage Horde. The Time of the Swarm.

The country is getting back to normal, though the loss can never be completely made up. Much land will have to be re-toiled from scratch, and the people who died can never, of course, be replaced. But more than that, the country has witnessed something I think is good . . .

They want this in the Congressional Record, every word of it, because the tactics of the project—allowing Mathou to work on alone under handicaps—and the tactics of that unnamed bureau who

watched him so carefully, yet would not help him, were so inhuman, that a law must be passed against its recurrence.

That law will be passed, indeed, but more than that, there will be a new awareness of the scientist and his personal problems.

No man will ever again have to beg for the right to create. No man will ever again have such a life as Mathou, so that he will be

forced into madness such as that which produced The Savage Horde.

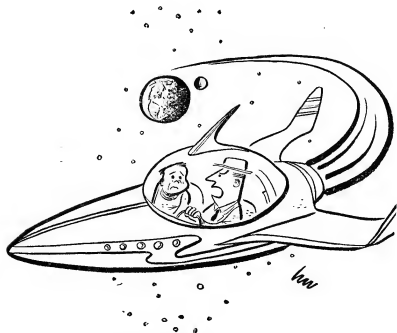
Mathou is gone, and I don't suppose anyone will erect any statues in his honor. It isn't likely.

But the Law will stand, and behind it . . . even as a maniac and a murderer . . . Franklyn Mathou stands.

He's gone, and that's all.

The guilt of the Swarm is upon us!

THE END



"This is a fine time to tell me!"

DISASTER REVISITED

By DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

It annoyed Jason Wall that everybody talked about death but nobody did anything about it. So he decided to eliminate the pesky nuisance. But in the end he longed for a chance to say, "Fellas—I was only kidding!"

"TELL me the truth, doctor," Jason Wall said. "We've known each other too long for lies."

The doctor nodded slowly, lit a cigarette and offered Jason Wall one. "Yes, we've known each other a long time—long enough so I know the truth, or anything you want, can't be kept from you."

Jason Wall smiled. He was a small, sparse man, very hard of eye and gaunt of face. He was about forty-five years old.

"Then here it is," the doctor said uneasily. "You're going to die, Jason. Eighteen months, maybe two years at the outside. There is absolutely no chance for a cure."

Jason Wall turned to the window and finished smoking his cigarette. Outside, chil-

dren were playing, the sun was shining, and a postman came by humming a gay tune. Jason Wall turned back to face the room and his own grim reality. "Shall I consult specialists? I can buy—"

The doctor shrugged. "You can, if you wish. I already have, on the biopsy."

"Pain?" Jason Wall asked.

The doctor nodded, yes. "Progressively worse. We'll be giving you narcotics the last six months or so."

Jason Wall pursed his thin lips. His gaunt face seemed, if anything, gaunter. That was the only sign that he had just been given his death sentence. He said: "Blast it, doctor, it isn't fair! It isn't fair, I tell you. I'm a rich man. Maybe the richest man in the world. I can buy anything—"



A time can come when jumping is all that's left.

anything, you hear me?" His voice went low suddenly, so low that the doctor could hardly hear it. "Anything but my health. Because don't let them tell you a man can't buy happiness. That's for sale too, doctor. Anything is—except a man's health. Blast it, it isn't fair. I've everything to live for."

The doctor said: "At least you're fortunate in one way. There'll be no widow, no orphaned children, no—"

"Family!" scoffed the doomed Jason Wall. "You think that's happiness? You think it matters?" He laughed, and there was nothing hysterical about the laughter. "You don't know what happiness is. None of you do. Happiness and selfishness, they're the same thing. The most successful men realize that, doctor. I realize I'm not exactly the world's best loved man. It doesn't matter, I tell you. It doesn't matter at all." He went to the window again, watched the children at play. "But that isn't fair. That's the hardest thing to take."

"Yes? What is?"

"Those children. The rest of the world. Out there. Playing. They don't know I'm going to die. If they knew, they wouldn't care. That hurts more than anything.

Doctor, I tell you the world ought to weep when Jason Wall dies. It ought to wear black."

"Mr. Wall, I know you won't mind my saying you're the most egotistical man I've ever met."

"Mind? I'm delighted. A man ought to be self-centered. Shall we say, ten thousand dollars?"

"Ten thousand—"

"Your fee, for telling me the truth. For telling me I'm going to die. For not keeping it back."

"My fee is fifty dollars, Mr. Wall."

"You'll take ten thousand. I give what I want, doctor, so I feel free to take what I want. Ten thousand dollars. You'll have your check in the morning. Thank you."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Wall," the doctor said.

Jason Wall left the office grumbling.

Eve came to him that night wearing the stone marten cape he'd given her for Christmas. She was a tall, regal blonde, long-legged and gorgeous. She was half a head taller than Jason Wall, was from Iowa, and had won the Miss Universe contest two years before. Naturally, since she'd been voted the world's

most beautiful woman, Jason Wall had had to possess her. He'd given her an outright gift of half a million dollars, and while most girls would have taken that and gone their way, Eve was different. Eve only knew it was a ripple on the surface of Jason Wall's bought happiness. She'd hung around for more. For much more.

"Drink?" Jason Wall asked.

"The usual."

They drank. The butler brought dinner, and they ate. Then there was a bottle of brandy, and cigarettes, and love play. Finally Eve said: "You seem restless tonight, Jason darling."

"Do I?"

"I ought to know. I know you better than anyone else does."

"You don't know me at all. No one does, I've seen to it."

"Is anything the matter?"

"Eve, you've never lied to me. That's one of the things about you I always admired, aside from your more obvious charms. Tell me, what would you do if I died?"

"Don't even talk like that!"

"Posh! Don't make believe you're sentimental. I want the truth. What would you do if I died in a year or two?"

"I—I don't even want to think about it."

"Actress! . Bah!" Jason Wall grabbed her wrist, twisting cruelly.

"Jason, you—you're hurting me!"

"Then tell me the truth. What would you do if I died?" His tone was urgent.

"I'd be—sad."

"Blast it, of course you'd be sad. I've given you the sort of life a girl dreams about. But what would you do?"

I—Jason, really!"

"Would you hook onto another man? Another rich man? You'd have to settle for second best, you know. I'm the richest man there is. But don't think I haven't seen how some of my business associates have been eying you. Don't think—"

"Jason, my arm."

"Then tell me what I want to know."

"All right. All right, I'll tell you. You've shown me what the good life is, Jason. I wouldn't want to be without it for long. I—I'd hook onto someone else, as you say."

Jason Wall smiled. "Thank you," he said sincerely. "Thank you so much for being honest."

He made love like a college

sophomore that night. Eve was quite pleasantly startled.

Later that week and for the next month or so, he thought of suicide. The trouble was, he had never been able to stand pain. A weakness. The one weakness he had. When he thought of the pain which would surely come, when he thought of the last few months of his life, which would be spent, pain-wracked, on his death bed, his thoughts leaned most strongly toward suicide. Yes, suicide was the obvious way out, and Jason Wall had neither religious nor moral scruples about it.

Jason Wall had religious scruples, or moral scurples, about nothing under the sun. He was an utterly egocentric man.

But when his thoughts of suicide were strongest he would remember what he'd seen from the doctor's window. Children at play, delighting in their simple pleasures. A postman at work, contented with his lot, humming gayly. Or, he would send for Eve, and take from her body what he craved. And, when it was over, he felt a strange, hollow sense of loss. No, he would tell himself with complete objectivity (he

had always been thoroughly objective) not exactly loss. A sense, rather, of lost possession, of something which belonged to Jason Wall, as his life belonged uniquely to him, and would be taken away at his death. He tried to imagine Eve in someone else's arms, Eve dancing with a younger man, drinking with him, making love. A rage of jealously flooded him, not for the particular man lucky enough to win Eve, but for the world. For everything in it.

For the whole blasted world, Jason Wall told himself.

He'd made his own world, fashioned it with the sweat of his brow and the cunning of his brain. But ultimately, it did not matter. He was going to die, to die in great pain. It wasn't fair that the rest of the world should go right on living, enjoying the life that Jason Wall had barely begun to taste. They'd see an article in the newspaper, perhaps. Famous Tycoon Dies. In a day, a week, they would forget. They would go on living out their little lives, enjoying their little enjoyments. But the sum total of them — three billion men, women, and children on Earth, was it?—added up to considerable enjoyment. Ja-

son Wall envied them with a desperate, passionate envy.

When his thinking evolved to the next stage, he knew with petty triumph that only Jason Wall would have taken that step. He had an incurable disease. He was going to die. But the world would go right on, generations after generations. It wasn't fair. They had no right to enjoy what he, Jason Wall, would lose forever.

He toyed—seriously toyed for some weeks—with the idea of destroying the world. It could be done: he never doubted it for a minute. To develop the atomic bomb, the governments of the free world had pooled their resources in a crash program costing two billion dollars, and had succeeded in a very few years. Two billion dollars—that was the kind of figure Jason Wall understood. For two billion dollars, couldn't he hire all the world's top scientists to build a super-bomb which would utterly destroy Earth?

He could, of course. In theory, such a crash program, with Jason Wall's money and industrial know-how behind it, was a possibility. But for another reason, for a very simple reason, it was quite obviously impossible.

The scientists wouldn't do it.

Suicide? Never. He decided that firmly, two months after the prognosis. World-destruction? Impossible. Then what?

It was Eve who, trying to flaunt an intellectual prowess she really did not have, told him about time travel. There was this article she had read in the newspaper Sunday supplement, about the possibility of moving backwards through time. There was absolutely no natural law which said it could not be done, the article said. It was merely a question of probability. For, while in theory time travel was possible, it was practically impossible—unless, as the article suggested and Jason Wall thought in triumph, you pushed it. If you pushed it, the improbability became a possibility, then a probability, then a reality.

Crash program, he thought.

The world was made of particles. All reality, particles. Discreet particles of matter, of time, of space-time. Building blocks of the universe. Now, take these particles; and return them to the positions they occupied a moment ago—and you travel into the immediate past. Re-arrange them into the

positions they occupied years ago, decades, generations, aeons—and you have time travel.

Crash program. Billions of dollars, he thought. All the world's great physicists. It could be done. He could do it.

But—so what?

Jason Wall smiled. It was the way his mind often functioned. Decide on something, apparently without relation to your problem. Then use it.

He couldn't have the world destroyed, despite his money and the decided possibility of instituting a crash program to do it. He wouldn't be able to fool the scientists, and the scientists just wouldn't do it.

But a crash program for time travel, now that was something else. That could be done. He would see that it *was* done.

For what purpose?

To return to the dawn of

the human race. To find dawn man, the first man. Call him Adam. To find the first truly human being.

To kill him.

To snuff humanity out at its source, as a flame is snuffed before it can start a fire.

To prevent the human race from enjoying what he would never enjoy. To destroy humanity by killing the first man.

Of course, he told himself, that would obliterate, along with the rest of mankind's history and comedy and tragedy, the first forty-five years of his own life. But those years didn't matter. By and large, they were the hard years. They were the years of toil and struggle, to give him the position and wealth he now had. Position and wealth—which he never would enjoy. Let them be obliterated then! With the rest of hu-

YOU CAN'T WALK BACK

Some good advice to space travelers: watch the seating plan very carefully, as part of the rocket drops off after reaching a certain height. Avoid the rear seats.



manity, not in any sudden catastrophe, but quickly and without pain, at the instant First Man is killed. . . .

A week later, he got the crash program underway. Since the world's scientists, like most of the world's intellectuals, were underpaid, it was comparatively simple hiring them, especially since this was a time of international calm. At first the physicists were dubious. Yes, the theoreticians said, time travel was a possibility. No, the engineers said, it couldn't be executed.

Execute it, he said. Here's money. Here are facilities. Here is everything you will need. If what you need doesn't exist, make it, buy it, steal it—but get it. Our time is limited. We have a year. One year to make it possible for one man to travel back in time.

After three months, they were shaking their heads.

After six months—when the first terrible twinges of pain had begun—they began to work feverishly.

Jason Wall went regularly to his physician at this time for the drugs that could ease his terrible suffering. They spoke, the doctor with no greater objectivity than Ja-

son Wall himself, of his disease. It was absolutely incurable. Even a crash program to find a cure wouldn't help Jason Wall. The damage done to his body was irreversible. And, the doctor mentioned in passing, it was hereditary. That is, the germ of the disease, or a predilection for it, or both, were carried in the blood of mankind like a scourge, had been so carried, as far as medical science knew, from the dawn of history and before.

If the murder he had planned ever bothered Jason Wall, which is doubtful, it certainly did not bother him now. What was killing him—hereditary! Why, the First Man he sought might himself be responsible. Killing him would almost be a pleasure...

After eight months something began to take shape. It was a little box. "For hamsters," one of the scientists said.

"Fool! I want to go."

They made the box bigger.

Ten months from the day the crash program had been started, the job was completed. Jason Wall had spent the last few days watching the world at play. Happy children, contented people, folks who didn't have much, but who did have happiness.

They would go right on enjoying themselves, after Jason Wall died. It wasn't fair, he told himself. And he would see to it that they didn't—by destroying their first ancestor, and his, so they would never be born, so the human race would never be . . .

" . . . all physical actions on the sub-microscopic level, on the level of molecules and atoms and sub-atomic particles and quanta of energy—all these actions," the chief physicist told Jason Wall, "are reversible. If you can control the reversal, you can return matter, energy, and space to its former state. Doing that, you travel through time. Therefore—"

"Never mind the details," Jason Wall snapped. "That's your department. I only want to know this: will it work. Will it take a man back through time."

"Yes, but—"

"Very well. I'll go."

"But we haven't figured out a way to return. If you go, you won't come back. You'll have to spend the rest of your life back there."

The rest of his life. Jason Wall smiled. The rest of his life could be measured in pain-wracked months, possibly only in weeks.

Fifteen minutes after his

discussion with the chief physicist, he sat down in the time chair. Anthropologists had been consulted for the final stages of the project. There would be no mistakes. He would go where and when he had to go . . .

"Ready, sir?"

"Ready," said Jason Wall. Ready to destroy the human race—

His vision flashed and blurred. Time moved backward for him.

A forest trail. Animals used it, had carved it out of the wall of jungle. And the first man?

Armed with a revolver, Jason Wall left the now useless time-chair and hid himself beside the trail. He waited three days, living on berries and a small marsupial creature he had caught with his bare hands. If First Man was around, he didn't want to frighten him off with gunfire.

At last, First Man came.

He was, Jason Wall observed with objective detachment, a noble-looking creature. The first true man. Over six feet tall, perfectly proportioned. He looked quite the healthiest man Jason Wall had ever seen. If looks meant anything, he had never

known a day of disease in his life, and never would. Jason Wall's determination to kill grew.

He did not have to wait long. When First Man came by his hiding place he stood up, pointed the revolver, and fired it point-blank.

He was, naturally, ready for the end. The death of First Man ought to mean the death of all men, the sudden blotting out, in all ages, of all mankind and all traces of mankind.

First Man fell, mortally wounded. Blood gushed from his nostrils; he died.

And Jason Wall went on existing. He didn't understand. It made no sense. The death of First Man should have brought all humanity in all future ages to an instant, painless end.

A woman, he thought.

There must be a woman. Already with child, perhaps, and therefore, the mother of all the human race . . .

Jason Wall followed the forest trail, his revolver ready.

If the woman turned out to be as beautiful as the man had been handsome, Jason Wall would not relish his job. He'd always had a soft-spot, the one soft-spot in his make-up, for beautiful women.

He found her in a little clearing before a cave.

She was quite the loveliest creature he had ever seen. She was stark naked, and showed no fear when she saw him. She showed, instead, a lively curiosity. She jabbered and smiled at him and came to him, open-handed, interested, friendly.

I'll kill her, he told himself, when the pain is too bad, when I can't stand it any longer. She can't get away. She expects nothing, nothing. Meanwhile, he decided to spend the last months of his life with this woman . . .

There was no reason to expect that she had been monogamous. One man or another would be all the same to her, if they could leave this area. If she wouldn't find the corpse of her mate. Jason took her hand, and they walked. They walked for a long time. Then they slept, then ate, then walked again. The woman jabbered. Jason Wall talked. He was enjoying himself immensely. There was no hurry. This was a new kind of life, a new kind of experience. He loved every moment of it.

They found another cave, three day's journey from the first. They lived there for

some weeks. The pain came more frequently, but Jason Wall withstood it.

The weeks became months. His days were numbered now, he knew that. It seemed just, somehow. After taking all that the first woman had to offer, he would kill her—and destroy all humankind.

She never had understood his affliction, his great pain. Pain from a wound she could understand. Once he had scraped his knee on a rock, and she had been extremely sympathetic. But pain from disease seemed unknown to her. Of course, Jason Wall knew, any disease was compounded of two things: a disease agent, bacteria or virus, and a susceptibility. Apparently First Man and First Woman had utterly no susceptibility. They were disease-free.

Some time later in the course of human development—how much later he did not yet know—susceptibility to disease had evolved.

The woman's belly grew round and Jason Wall knew she was going to have a baby. His baby.

He sighed. His time was short. The baby would never be born, because he would kill its mother first.

Then it struck him like a blow. A baby. His baby. And First Man and First Woman—free of disease. He had introduced disease into the human makeup, by planting his seed in this woman!

Including his own . . .

He could break the pattern by killing her. Then, as he had planned originally, there would be no childbirth, and no mankind.

He lifted the pistol. The look on his face must have given him away. Probably, she thought it was a club. He was pain-wracked and very much weakened by his disease now. She took the pistol away from him easily, and shrugged, and cried a little, and went away.

He ran after her.

"Wait!" he screamed. "Wait, you don't understand! You've got to die. You've got to—"

He fell. His legs drummed feebly. She was gone. The pistol was gone. Humanity would live—the life of torment and pain and disease that it had always known.

And he would die, alone, wracked by the ailment he had introduced into the human line.

He lay there.

It took him a long time to die.

THE END

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QUEST OF THE GOLDEN APE

(Synopsis of Previous Installments)

ABARIA AND OFRID were opposing nations on Tarth, twin-planet to Earth lying beyond the sun. Abaria defeated Ofrid by treachery and leveled the nation to the ground, Retoc of Abaria killing Quecn Evalla of Ofrid after fiendish torture. But Portox, the Ofridian scientist, transported Bram Forest, Evalla's infant son to Earth where the prince grew to manhood in suspended animation and then returned to Tarth—a full grown man—to avenge his mother.

As he arrives, Retoc has just slain Jlomec, brother of Bontarc and Volna, rulers of powerful Nadia. The slaying is witnessed by Ylia, the Brown Virgin, who saves Bram Forest from death after Retoc wounds him seriously. While she nurses Bram, Retoc is hunting for her, fearing she will tell Bontarc that he killed Jlomec. Retoc has no fear of Volna, as she is conspiring with him to rule Tarth.

Bram Forest is separated from Ylia but they come together again in Nadia City where they are captured and sentenced to be chained on the funeral barge of the dead Jlomec when it moves down the River of Ice toward the dread Place of the Dead from which there is no return. And all the while, Bram ponders the cryptic verse which he must solve in order to save Tarth:

An ape, a boar, a stallion,
A land beyond the stars.
A virgin's feast, a raging beast,
A prison without bars.



QUEST OF THE GOLDEN APE

By IVAR JORGENSEN
and ADAM CHASE

Part Three

14

Land Beyond the Stars

AT FIRST Retoc the Abarian was too stunned by what he witnessed to think coherently. With the other Tarthians of royal blood he had received an unexpected summons to appear at the Royal Dock on the River of Ice and, before he could even try to fathom what it was about, an escort of Nadian guards had come to fetch him.

It was cold and murky on the banks of the River of Ice. The two men, Retoc and Hul-

tax had arrived barely in time to see them unfastening the hawsers of the Royal Barge. Curious, he pushed closer through the crowd of nobles. Suddenly, before the barge was quite unmoored, as it swayed and rocked on the currents of the river, Nadian soldiers appeared with a platform on poles slung across their shoulders, the usual means of intra-city transportation for Nadian royalty. But this was no royalty Retoc saw on the platform, although they were dressed as royalty.

The woman, conscious and bound hand and foot, was the Virgin of the Wayfarers who had witnessed Prince Jlomec's death. The man, unconscious, his head propped high on pillows, was the white giant who once on the Plains of Ofrid had almost strangled Retoc.

A hatred such as he had never known flashed through Retoc's brain. He was so close he could see the gentle up-and-down motion of the giant's chest as he breathed. Then, beyond the platform, he saw Volna. Volna smiled at him. The platform bobbed by, was placed on the barge at the foot of Jlomec's bier. The remaining hawsers were cut loose.

There was, Retoc thought triumphantly, no return from the Place of the Dead.

But still, the white giant had recovered from what looked like certain death once, had vanished abruptly and fantastically when he would have died again. What was good enough for Volna the Beautiful was not necessarily good enough for Retoc of Abaria. He watched only long enough to see the royal barge pushed out into the icy currents of the river, then he turned and made his way to the second tier of observers, where Hultax stood among the lesser nobility and the military officers of the planet Tarth. He found Hultax and whispered for a time in his ear.

Hultax's face blanched. "But lord," he protested, "there is no return . . . it is obvious the man will die . . . you couldn't expect me to . . ." Hultax, frightened, confused, could neither think clearly nor express himself properly. His mouth hung open.

"Earlier, Hultax," Retoc said with a hard smile, "you craved action. I give you action. Take a boat. There are some moored down-river for the use of Nadian priests on their religious pilgrimages to



The boar charged



while death and the Golden Ape stood grinning.

the banks where the stilt-birds dwell. Overtake the royal barge. Board it. Slay the man and the woman."

"But I—the Place of the Dead . . ."

"Fool!" hissed Retoc. "I didn't ask you to visit the Place of the Dead. That's up to you. If you slay them first, on the River of Ice, and can bring back proof . . . but the longer we talk, the further they are. You'll go?"

It was phrased as a question; actually, it was a command. Grim-faced, the whip-sword trailing at his side, Hultax left the crowd of soldiers and made his way downstream. A few moments later he had poled a wooden skiff out into the icy current and went down-river in pursuit of the royal barge.

The guards had unbound Ylia's fetters on the barge, knowing she could never swim for safety in the waters of the River of Ice. She sat now at the foot of Jlomec's bier, with Bram Forest's handsome head cushioned on her lap. It was very cold there on the river. Wind blew, rustling the reeds which grew along the bank. They had long since emerged from the river's underground cavern. The swift current carried

them now through a country of ice, a tundra. The reeds, twice as tall as a man, seemed to thrive on the riverbanks. They swallowed everything.

Bram Forest opened his eyes, and looked at her, and smiled. He tried to sit up, wincing as pain knifed through his head. "We seem to make a habit of this," he said, smiling again.

"Shh, you mustn't talk."

She leaned close. He could smell the animal perfume of her body, like musk and jasmine. Impulsively, she kissed him softly on the lips. His arm went around her neck. He pulled her head down and drank deeply of her.

"Why . . ." she began, all breathless.

"Because I love you. I think I loved you the first moment I saw you. But I didn't know it then." He laughed softly, gently, and she did not know why this should be so.

"Why do you laugh?"

"I was an infant, the son of the Queen. Of Queen Evalla. Portox the scientist fled with me, the last of the royal Ofridian blood, to the other side of the solar system, to a world the twin of this, a world we never see because the sun always stands between us, a world called

Earth. There I would wait until maturity. There I would be given the strength and the wisdom I needed. And then I would return to Tarth and right the ancient wrong. Well, I have returned. I love you. It is enough, Ylia. I want to think of the future, not the past."

Ylia let him kiss her again. "Isn't it the same, the future and the past? Aren't they one? I too am of Ofridian blood, Bram Forest, of the lesser nobility. There are hundreds of us, living nomadic lives on the Ofridian Plains, where once our great nation stood."

"I didn't know that. It wasn't in Portox's training. Now Portox is dead. I buried him on this world called Earth. He could not even come back to his native Tarth."

"Darling, don't you see? That's exactly why the ancient wrong must be righted, why Retoc must pay for his infamous deeds. So Portox and the millions of other Ofridians, slain, all slain, can sleep eternally in peace. You are their champion."

"But revenge? What is revenge if—"

"You are the champion of the future too! Don't you see, oh, don't you? Of all the un-

born tomorrows when the Ofridian nation may live again. Of all the unborn tomorrows when the nations of Tarth can live together in peace and harmony. Don't you understand that?"

"It's funny. I try to see my mother's face. Queen Evalla. But all I see is you. She's the past, Ylia. You're the future." He held her lightly.

"There is no future for anyone as long as Retoc the Abarian rules, and dreams of Tarth, all Tarth, as his domain."

Bram Forest stood up. The cold winds blew. He looked at the blue-cold body of Jlomec, lying in state, at the ice-choked river, at the banks of rustling reeds. He did not have to ask where they were. He knew. "Perhaps," he said at last. "I only mean that if I do this thing it will be more to see that future generations live in peace than to bring vengeance on a power-mad Abarian."

"Oh, Bram! That's what I wanted you to say. I wanted to hear you say that. For tomorrow! For all our tomorrows."

Bram Forest walked to the rail of the barge, and gripped it, and looked out over the ice-flows. He recited:

"An ape, a boar, a stallion,
A land beyond the stars.
A Virgin's feast, a raging
beast,
A prison without bars."

"Why, what an unusual poem!" Ylia cried. Then: "Hold me close, it's so cold. And I'm afraid, Bram Forest . . ."

"Of the Place of the Dead?"

"Yes, yes. The Place of the Dead."

"It and the poem are entwined," Bram Forest said musingly. "I know they are. Together, they're my destiny."

"And the destiny of all Tarth?"

"Perhaps. Portox liked to think so, I guess."

"I like to think so, Bram Forest." She smiled up at him tremulously. "And my destiny as well."

"Ylia," he asked abruptly, "what do you know about the Golden Ape? You mentioned it to me once, when you thought I . . . well, when you thought I endangered your virginity."

"Why, nothing beyond what the legends say."

"And what do the legends say?"

"It is written in the most ancient of our religious be-

liefs that the messenger to the Place of the Dead is a Golden Ape. Naturally, in these same beliefs, a defiled virgin is supposed to kill herself. Thus, in a way of speaking, she goes to the Golden Ape. You see?"

Bram Forest smiled down at her. "What would you think if I told you the Golden Ape was real? If I told you that there actually was a Place of the Dead?"

"For the spirits of the departed?" Ylia asked in a very small voice.

"No. Man can't presume to know about that. It's in the realm of the gods. I mean a place which somehow borders on Tarth and yet . . . yet is beyond the stars. A place which, when wayfarers returned from it miraculously long and long ago, gave rise to the legends."

"Borders on Tarth . . . yet beyond the stars? How can this be?"

"Portox found it and explained it with his science," Bram Forest insisted. "Earth and Tarth, twin worlds, yet so different, forever unseen one by the other, on opposite sides of the sun. They're unique in the solar system, Ylia. Portox thought—if the memory he planted in my

mind is correct—that they're unique in the entire universe. Somehow, a million million years ago, a world split, becoming two worlds. But ordinary space . . . I don't know, the memory is confused . . . could not hold them. There is a warp of space, a place where space bends. Learn to master the warp and you go instantly from Tarth to Earth, or back again. That was the way Portox brought me, as an infant, to Earth." He held aloft his arm, showing her the steel-silver disc. "With this I can travel back and forth at will. Without it, either Earth or Tarth would be my prison . . ." His voice trailed off.

Then he blurted: "A prison without bars!"

"What . . ."

"The prophetic poem. Part of the poem. Anyway, Ylia, Earth and Tarth exist at either end of this space warp, connected thus through normal space where there should be no connection. And someplace along the warp—where ordinary space-time distances don't matter . . ."

"I'm sorry, Bram Forest. I don't understand you."

"I'm not sure I understand myself. Tarth is a primitive world. It is beyond our sci-

ence. It is even beyond the science of Earth, I believe, and Earth is a millennium ahead of Tarth in its development. But Portox knew. Anyhow, someplace along the warp—in ordinary distances along the space-time continuum perhaps a billion light years distant from either Earth or Tarth, is a third world. On the warp it is very close. The River of Ice leads to it. We call it the Place of the Dead."

"But the Golden Ape—?"

"—inhabits the so-called Place of the Dead. Their world was dying, but Portox saved them. I think . . . the science is beyond me . . . the entropy of their galaxy was running down . . . their world perishing, freezing . . . when somehow with his great science Portox claimed for their use the unavailable energy in their . . . their themodynamic system, and saved them."

"Why do you frown so?"

"Words. Words only. I don't understand. I can only act."

"You can act," Ylia said, hugging herself tight against him. "For Tarth and the future."

"For Tarth and the future," Bram Forest said, but he hardly heard the words.

Ahead of them in the cold

clear air a wall seemed to rise. It came up so suddenly, and, in fact, the air had cleared so suddenly from the accustomed murkiness, that Ylia was afraid. "It is in the legend," she whispered. "The Black Wall, Bram Forest. And beyond it—the Place of the Dead."

"More accurately, an edge-on view of the space-warp, where it meets the normal world." But although he spoke the words of Portox, Bram Forest did not sound too confident.

"We're coming closer to it, Bram. Hold me!"

He held her. There was nothing else he could do. The current swept the barge on inexorably. The Black Wall reared ahead of them, frowned down at them, seemed to block off all the rest of the universe and all reality whether of Earth or of TARTH . . .

The barge penetrated the wall. Black and solid-seeming, solid as stone, it yet offered no resistance. The barge disappeared within it.

Behind the barge, rope-trailing so close that its prow almost scraped the royal wood, was a skiff in which, shaking and afraid yet somehow triumphant because he had heard Bram Forest's

strange words, was HULTAX the Abarian.

15

The Golden Ape

HULTAX the Abarian shook himself. He had lost consciousness as every nerve-ending in his body had screamed with pain. Did this have something to do with the warp — warping? — Bram Forest had mentioned. Hultax the Abarian did not know. But he did know that he was alive, as alive as anyone could be or had a right to be in the Place of the Dead. And he did know, gratefully, that the intense cold of the River of Ice was gone.

He wondered how long he had been unconscious. He blinked his eyes. A balmy, pink-tinted sky. A pink sun, not on the horizon, when indeed the sun might be pink, but overhead. On the horizon — Hultax blinked again and thought he was mad—a second sun, smaller, paler, the ghost of green in color.

The royal barge was in ruins. It had piled up on some rocks. The bier of JIOMEK, Prince of Nadia, had been thrown clear. He could see it on the bank, also in ruins. He stood up unsteadily, then

waded through the shallow water in which he'd regained consciousness, over to the wreck of the royal barge. The fingers of his right hand were poised inches from the hilt of his whip-sword. Slay Bram Forest and the girl if the wreck hadn't already killed them? He shook his head. Bram Forest knew more about this strange place, this world of the pink sun and the green sun, than he did.

He climbed over the wreckage, and finally came upon the two bodies. He went down on his knees beside them. They were covered with blood. They were broken—broken being the only word that could describe them. They had been crushed, perhaps by falling timber, perhaps by the bier of Jlomec as it hurtled over the side. There probably was not a bone in either of their bodies, at least a major bone, which had not been crushed.

They were dead.

With a craftiness which surprised even himself, Hultax remembered the dead Bram Forest's words. It was the bracelet with the shining disc which gave Bram Forest the power to appear and disappear at will, as Retoc had described. Or, as Bram Forest

had put it, to journey between the worlds. Carefully, Hultax took the bracelet—it was miraculously intact—from the crushed, broken arm of Bram Forest's corpse. He circled his own arm with it and felt, or imagined he felt, an instantaneous source of power surge through his body. Without looking back at the broken bodies of the man and woman who had found love and, finding it, died in each other's arms, he made his way from the river bank across a pleasant green meadow. Far in the distance he saw a dark blur which looked like a forest. It was many miles away, almost at the limit of vision.

Yet, incredibly, it seemed to rush up at him. It was not merely that Hultax the Abarian walked with a warrior's long stride toward the forest. It was as if the forest rushed toward him. A different world. He remembered Bram Forest's words vaguely. A warped world? Something like that. Naturally, Hultax was afraid. This was the Place of the Dead, wasn't it? But still, Bram Forest's cool if little-understood scientific explanation quieted his fear. Besides, didn't he have the bracelet-disc-amulet? What could happen to him now?

Bylanus the Golden Ape, only two-thousand seven hundred years old, quite young as Golden Apes went, saw the wreck of the barge from a great distance. He extended his vision through warp-space and spotted the tiny figure of a man trudging away from the wreckage. Bylanus squinted, and shifted his buttocks on the saddle. Bylanus was fifteen feet tall and weighed eight-hundred pounds. The steed he rode, about twice the size of an Earth elephant, looked like a blown-up cross between a Tarthian stad and an Earth horse.

Bylanus stared, then sat up very straight in his stirrups. Something gleamed on the man's arm. Bylanus gaped.

It was the bracelet of Portox-saviour.

Bylanus used his will to psychokinesthize the man. The man, still apparently trudging along, sped toward him.

Bylanus climbed down from his stallion and prepared to bow, all fifteen feet and eight hundred pounds of him, before the man.

At first Hultax could think only of fleeing. Abruptly before him stood a monster-stad and a man. No, not a man. A man-like figure pelted with

soft, smooth, lustrous, golden fur. The stad—the not-quite-stad—was five times bigger than a stad had a right to be. The man, even as he unexpectedly bent before Hultax, was almost three times Hultax's height. Man? No, not a man. Hultax, rooted with fear to the spot, unable to run, opened his mouth to cry out. But his vocal chords were paralyzed.

This was no man. It was the Golden Ape of legend, the Golden Ape of the Place of the Dead . . .

"Portox-saviour," said the Golden Ape quite distinctly. Then he pointed a forefinger almost the size of Hultax' forearm at the bracelet Hultax wore.

Hultax took a deep breath and could feel the strength returning to his legs. Like all military officers, he was an opportunist. He had to be, for in battle one had to seize upon opportunity as soon as it appeared, if one were to win at all . . .

Hultax said, his voice surprisingly steady: "You may rise."

The Ape did so. The stallion pawed the ground, and great clods flew. Hultax was trembling, but the Ape, speaking in Hultax' own lan-

guage, in the language of all Tarth, said: "Are you really from Portox? It seems like only yesterday he was here although, of course, your people and mine measure time differently."

"I am from Portox," Hultax said. He wished he could keep his knees from trembling.

"Portox-saviour said that one day a man would come, to ask us for help even as Portox helped us in our time of troubles," the Ape proclaimed.

"Yes," Hultax muttered.

"What kind of help do you wish?"

Hultax stared, saying nothing. He did not know what to say. He lacked the imagination to make something up. Somehow, he knew it was terribly important. He knew without knowing how he knew that his life might depend on his answer.

"Well?" the Golden Ape asked gently.

"I . . . that is . . ."

The Ape's eyes narrowed as he looked down at Hultax. "You are from Portox?"

"Yes, yes. Of course."

"I see you have the bracelet."

"Yes, here is the bracelet."

"And the cloak of Portox?" demanded the Ape. "The

cloak Portox foretold you would wear?"

"I—I lost the cloak in my journey," lied Hultax, not knowing about any cloak. There, he thought, that ought to satisfy him.

But the Ape said: "There was no cloak."

"No cloak? No cloak!"

"I made that up, to test you. You're not from Portox."

The stallion pawed the ground and looked up and then down at Hultax, snorting. Hultax, trembling, wished he could melt into the ground.

"Still," Hultax said, shaking, "I am from Portox. You tried to trick me. You . . ."

"We shall see," the Ape said, still pleasantly. "Come."

The ground rolled, or so it seemed to Hultax. The forest loomed ahead of him, then trees were all around him, then they stood on a rolling plain again.

"Where—did you take me?"

The Ape smiled. He seemed quite human despite his size, despite his fur. The stallion pawed the ground impatiently.

"Behold," said the Ape.

Something on the fringe of the forest screamed. It was an awful sound and it made

the hackles stand upright on Hultax's bull-neck. He drew his whip-sword and faced the forest.

"Well, man," chided the Golden Ape, "and do you need a weapon? Portox told us we would know his man because his man, unarmed, would be able to conquer the wild boar of the Kranuian Wood. And you?"

The screaming came again. Terrified, Hultax did not fling his weapon aside. Wild boar? What wild boar . . . time enough later . . . to convince the Ape . . .

The boar emerged. It was almost as big as a man and covered with dirty gray hair. Its tusks were two feet long. The stallion whinnied but remained perfectly still. The Golden Ape waited and watched. The boar charged.

Hultax's right arm blurred and the mobile blade of the whip-sword whizzed through air and struck the boar's meaty shoulder. The boar screamed, and came on.

It was, Hultax realized in despair, only a superficial wound. The boar came on, bleeding, furious. He tried to lunge aside. He yanked at the whip-sword and it came loose, making him lose his balance. The boar reached him, screaming.

Never slackening its pace, the boar gored him, and wheeled about, clods flying, to gore again. Hultax' voice bubbled in his throat. The boar was on him again, its tusks sharp as razors . . .

Finally it stood clear, nervously eying Bylanus and the stallion. Then it turned and, slowly, with great dignity, retreated into the Kranuian Wood, which was its home.

The man, Bylanus saw at a glance, was dead. As an imposter, he had deserved to die. Bylanus quickly dug a shallow grave with a large, sharp-edged stone, and rolled the body in. As he did so he noticed that the bracelet—the bracelet of Portox-saviour, or, more probably, a copy of that bracelet intended to trick him—had been battered, punctured, and broken by the boar. Even if it had been the real bracelet, the amazing steel-silver disc of Portox-saviour, it would now be useless. Sighing, Bylanus buried it with Hultax' body.

Bylanus mounted his steed and galloped toward the river. He could have psychokinesthized himself there, but the day was brilliant and clear, and he was in no great hurry. At last he reached the wreck of the royal barge of

Nadia. He did not pause to examine Jlomec's bier, he had seen such funerary devices before.

Something in the wreck itself confused him. There was a man. There was a woman. That fit the ritual—two servants to accompany dead royalty on its way. This was the custom of the Nadians. But the man . . .

On the man's crushed arm, the arm completely covered with blood, was a mark. It was as if something—say, a band of metal—had protected the arm at one point. For circling the upper arm was a band of skin not bloody like the rest, wide in the shape of a disc, then narrow all around.

The bracelet of Portox-saviour! thought Bylanus. Had this dead man worn it? Had the imposter, now slain by the wild boar, taken it from him?

Oh Portox-saviour, Portox-saviour, how long dead? Am I too late, is it too late for this man, your heir . . . ?

As gently as he could, the huge Bylanus lifted the two bodies and put them in his saddle-bags. He faced the Kranuian Wood astride. The stallion held its head up, alert, ready. They psycho-kinesthized.

And disappeared in a twinkling with Bram Forest and Ylia, both of whom were dead.

16

The Raging Beast

ALTHOUGH once mighty Ofridia of Tarth and certainly the nations of Earth had outstripped Bylanus' world in the physical science, the planet of the pink and green suns was supreme in biology. Thus had it needed Portox' help, a hundred Earth-Tarthian years before, when run-down entropy threatened its very existence. On the other hand, through biology, the science of Bylanus' world had come a long way in the conquest of death and destroyed human tissue. So it was that with some faint ray of confidence Bylanus brought the two broken bodies to the single large city of his park-like planet. There, tenderly, he left them in the care of specialists at the regeneration station, and began his long vigil.

. . . sensation and movement.

Hardly anything at first. Bram Forest dreamed of dreaming. The motion was gentle, warm, comfortable.

The glow of life and not the cold breath of death . . .

With it, with the first stirrings of regeneration, came the shadow of pain. But it was far away and almost impalpable, pain understood rather than felt. And slowly the pain departed. There came a time when Bram Forest realized he was not breathing, was, indeed, immersed in liquid.

He floated, helpless, serene, strangely content.

. . . Until, with the first signs of impatience, strength flooded through his regenerated limbs.

"In every cell of a living creature's body," Orro the bio-technician explained to Bylanus, "there is the potential for complete and perfect regeneration. For, whereas the eye is an organ to see with, in every one of the millions of tiny cells making up the eye is the gene-pattern not merely for the eye but for the rest of the body. Theoretically then, Bylanus, if we are given but a single intact cell of a living—or once-living — organism, we ought to be able to reproduce the organism in its entirety. This is not supernatural. It is not creation of life: we can create nothing. The secret of

creation is not ours here at this laboratory. But we have mastered the secret of re-creation. Nurtured by the life-giving fluid, their development controlled by their own genes, the two human beings you brought are being made whole again."

Bylanus nodded. Orro the bio-technician was loquacious and spoke quickly, confidently, with mild pedantic enthusiasm. As for Bylanus, he awaited the re-generation of the man who had worn Portox-saviour's bracelet. He looked at the bodies in the vat, hanging upside-down, floating head down, rocking gently in the warm, circulating life-fluid. He waited . . .

Bram Forest took his first breath. The first thing he said was: "Ylia, Ylia . . ."

Bylanus met them after the vat had been drained and a door had opened for them. He told them what had happened, including the death of Hultax. Then he added:

"As far as I am concerned, there can be no doubt as to your identity. But the bracelet is lost forever and there will be some who doubt your identity." Abruptly, he seemed to change the subject: "How do you feel?"

"Good as new," Bram For-

est said. He was naked. He was tingling with health and well-being, as if he'd awakened from a long, health-giving sleep. He looked at Ylia, her skin glowing, her hair gleaming, her glorious body a shining promise. Then he frowned. Bylanus' words took meaning. "You want me to fight the Boar of the Kranuian Wood, is that it?"

"Yes," Bylanus said.

Bram Forest shrugged. "Coming here was not my idea, although Portox somehow realized it would be so."

"Slay the Kranuian Boar, proving your identity without question, and all the Golden Apes will be yours to command."

"Yes, but did Portox really feel I must wreak upon Abaria and the Abarians the same destruction they brought to Ofridia? If I destroy Retoc the Abarian responsible for what happened a hundred years ago, wouldn't that be enough? I don't need the Golden Apes for that. I can do it myself. I must do it myself."

"Tarth," said Bylanus, "is a world of warring nations. But here on the planet of two suns we live in peace. We are strong but know not the meaning of war. Is that what

Portox-saviour wished for your people?"

"Perhaps," Bram Forest said.

"Then," Ylia told him, speaking for the first time, "even if you slay Retoc, his legions will not willingly give up their arms."

Bram Forest nodded slowly. The idea of a TARTH-wide holocaust did not appeal to him, but if all TARTH could be shown the folly of war when its most powerful army went down to defeat before the Golden Apes . . .

"Thank you," Bram Forest said humbly to the Golden Ape. He had a vision—almost mystical—of a time in the future, perhaps the near future, when all TARTH knew nothing but the ways of peace. "When we return on the River of Ice we want you to accompany us. I'm ready to meet your boar."

Ylia held him. Tears glistened in her eyes. "Bram Forest," she said tremulously. "Now that I've found you, I don't want you to be hurt—ever again."

Bram Forest responded: "Don't worry, Ylia. If Portox hadn't known I'd be more than a match for the boar, he never would have established its conquest as proof of my identity."

"But . . . but don't you see, you've been re-generated, as Bylanus said. You may not be as strong as you were."

Bram Forest looked at Bylanus, who shrugged. Bylanus lifted them when Bram Forest nodded. The park-like terrain flashed by. A dark forest loomed. The Kranuian Wood . . .

Close at hand, an animal screamed.

"How do I look, Proklam?" Volna asked her seneschal.

He bowed before her. "You are lovely, O My Queen."

Volna smiled. She wore the royal purple of Nadia in a gown which fell, clinging as if sentient and voluptuous, to the wonderful curves of her body. "I'm not your Queen yet," she said, laughing.

"A mere formality, My Queen."

"I am Volna, Virgin Princess of Nadia, sister to Bontarc the King."

"Huh!" snorted the old man. "That is your official title. But what do titles matter? When this day ends you will rule all TARTH side by side with Retoc the Abarian."

Yes, Volna thought. With Retoc the Abarian. But how long would *that* alliance last? Would either of them be con-

tent to share power with the other? Wouldn't there come a day when she would give the nod to Proklam and the legions would march against those of Abaria chanting, "All power to Volna! All power to Volna the Beautiful!" The thought of power, power over strong men, over leaders of nations, made her giddy with desire.

All the royal blood of TARTH was gathered in Nadia City now, for the funeral games. She knew Retoc's plan: her spies had confirmed it. Retoc's legions would slay the rulers of the multiple nations and clans of TARTH and one by one, stunned, leaderless, the small nations would flock to the banners of Abaria and Nadia. If, then, Retoc had in mind to betray her and claim all power for himself, her own legions would be rested and ready. And Bontarc? she thought. What of Bontarc, her brother?

As if he could read her thoughts, Proklam said, "I have arranged the lists for the dueling which will end the games, majesty. Bontarc, as you know, expects a duel to the first blood with some competent whip-swordsman." Proklam licked his thin, dry lips. "He will be confronted, instead by a duel to the death

with Retoc, the best swordsman of all Tarth. To flee would mean cowardice. The army would then be loyal to you, majesty. To remain and fight would mean only one thing"

"Death," said Volna softly.

She could hear the legions. The legions seemed to chant in her ears: "All power to Volna the Beautiful!"

She thought of the day's funeral games. Games for the memory of Jlomec the Prince, indeed. They were games for her, for Volna. They would be a party celebrating the rise to power of Volna, Virgin Princess of Nadia. But of course neither Nadia nor Bontarc its rightful ruler knew that yet. And when they did, Retoc and his legions would make sure they could do nothing about it.

The Games would be a feast. Volna's feast . . .

All power to Volna.

The Kranuian Boar came screaming from the forest.

Its small, close-set eyes found Bram at once. If it had seen Bylanus and Ylia, it ignored them. Four hundred pounds of muscle and sinew, it made, stomping and pawing, for Bram.

He side-stepped nimbly, saw the massive head go

down, felt one of the wicked tusks brush his thigh with fire. He stumbled and almost fell. If he fell, he would not rise again. The boar would finish him first.

"Bram Forest!" Ylia screamed.

He got up and grasped the tusks. He was dragged along, furrowing the ground. The huge head snorted close to his own. The boar's breath almost made him gag. Then, before the boar could smash him into a tree-trunk, he let go and rolled over and over and quickly stood up.

The boar did not wait for him to regain his breath, but came charging at once. This time Bram Forest waited until the last possible instant before the tusks would impale him. Then he leaped, twisting around in air. It was a prodigious leap and brought a word of exclamation even to Bylanus' lips. He landed on the hard-muscled back of the boar and at once clamped his knees firmly against its sinewy flanks as if he had been trained all his life for this job.

The boar reared and bucked and swung its great body from side to side, trying to dislodge its tormentor. But Bram Forest clung as if all Tarth depended on the out-

come of this contest—as, perhaps, it did.

The boar ducked its head. Bram Forest fell forward, but his knees locked. The boar rolled over, but moving so swiftly that the eye could hardly follow him, Bram Forest squirmed out from under and was seated astride again when the boar got to its feet.

Then, leaning forward, Bram Forest grasped the two tusks and began to pull the boar's head up and back toward him.

The animal's screaming became squealing. Slowly the head went back, the short, almost non-existent neck strained, the beady eyes darted.

Then there was a loud snapping sound and the boar squealed once and fell over on its side with a broken neck.

Bram Forest, panting, the muscles of his legs quivering,

stood clear. Bylanus touched his great golden head to the ground. Ylia ran to Bram Forest and flung her arms about his neck. "I was afraid," she said. "I was so afraid you would be hurt."

Bram Forest kissed her. She clung to him, sobbing his name when their lips parted. Finally Bram Forest disengaged himself and said:

"The poem, Ylia. We've seen an ape, a boar, a stallion. This world is the 'land beyond the stars.' But was the boar also the raging beast?"

Ylia shrugged. Bylanus stood up and told Bram Forest, "The Golden Apes are ready to serve you in any way you wish."

Three worlds, Bram Forest thought. One which Portox had saved from doom, one which had been the haven in which Bram Forest had grown to manhood, and one



... there was a better who literally *did* eat his shirt. He was a Harvard chemistry professor who, upon losing a bet, dissolved his shirt in acid, neutralized the acid with a base, filtered out the precipitated material, spread it on a slice of bread, and ate it for lunch.

in which all their destinies soon would be written.

"Then Tarth thanks you," Bram Forest told the Golden Ape Bylanus. "Assemble your fighters. We're going back up the River of Ice."

"To Nadia City?" Ylia asked.

Bram Forest nodded grimly. "To Nadia City—and Retoc."

Bontarc, King of Nadia, asked his royal guest, "You like the Games so far?"

They sat, with Princess Volna, in the box of honor at the Amphitheater of Nadia. "Aye, I like them," Retoc said slowly. "But sire, I would like them much better if they were not to commemorate the passing of your noble brother, the Prince Jlomec."

Bontarc nodded his head in gratitude. "That was well-spoken, Retoc," he said.

Retoc went on: "Have you any idea who killed him so treacherously? Jlomec was not a fighting man."

"None," Bontarc admitted. He missed entirely the smile which passed between Retoc and Princess Volna.

"Well," Bontarc said after a while, "if you will excuse me, I must go down below to prepare for the dueling. Under the circumstances I'm

hardly inclined to participate in the Games, but my people expect it of me."

"Yes, brother," Volna said softly. "They do. Oh, they do."

And Bontarc went. Retoc looked at Volna. "I'd best get ready myself," he said. Volna nodded her lovely head.

A blood-lusting animal cry welled up from a hundred thousand throats as the gladiators of Nadia marched out across the sands of the amphitheater to do battle with the fierce snow-sloths of the Plains of Ice.

While several jeks from the Gates of Ice, Retoc's legions waited . . .

"Wait here," Bram Forest told Bylanus, who had led them safely, along with the vanguard of the Golden Apes, back up the River of Ice.

"What will you do, Bram Forest?"

"According to Ylia, we can trust Bontarc of Nadia. He's a fighting man, but he craves peace for all Tarth."

"I'm sure of it," Ylia said. "Bontarc didn't send us to the Place of the Dead. Princess Volna did. And long ago, according to the stories the Wayfarers of Ofrid tell, Bontarc and your mother, Queen Evalla, were allies striving

to establish universal peace throughout Tarth. Besides, despite his civility and fairness, Bontarc losses no love on Retoc of Abaria."

"And if you need us?" Bylanus asked.

"We'll get a signal through to you," Bram Forest said. With Ylia he climbed into a skiff and poled it out into the river.

Now the riverbanks were deserted, except for the solitary stilt-birds, tall as men, wading out into the frigid water, their low-pitched calls all but swallowed by the sound the cold wind made rustling through the river rushes.

After a while the skiff came to a bend in the river. It was the last turn before the Gates of Ice—and Nadia City. Here the wind blew more strongly, and there was a section of rushes which had been cleared, cut probably by an Ice Fields nomad who had used the tall rushes as fuel.

"Look!" Ylia cried suddenly, startled.

Through the gap in the rushes, at a distance of two or three jeks across the flat plain from the river, Bram Forest saw an armed encampment. There were tents with flying standards, tethered stads, pyramids of stacked

spears like hayricks, and pacing sentries.

"What can it mean?" Ylia asked. "Those standards are Abarian."

"Retoc," Bram Forest said. He lifted the pole and felt the mud of the river-bottom cling to it before it came clear. He allowed the skiff to drift toward the bank. "Retoc's planning treachery. We'll have to go back and alert the Golden Apes. Bylanus and his Apes can destroy Retoc's legions before they even march on Nadia City."

"But we can't go back, Bram. If Retoc's army is here, ready, then what's happening in Nadia City? Who can say what Retoc is doing? You'll have to go ahead and stop him—or at least delay him. I'll go back for Bylanus."

Bram Forest shook his head. "I can't let you go alone, Ylia. Not with the Abarian legions so close."

"But I must, don't you see?"

Bram Forest frowned. There did not seem any other way, but he was reluctant. "I love you, Ylia. I couldn't let—"

"What happens in Nadia City today is more important than our love, Bram Forest!

What would our love mean if Retoc the Abarian ruled all Tarth?"

"Then you take the skiff," Bram Forest said finally. "I can make my way to the city along the bank."

"No. The army is still encamped. They won't do anything for some time yet. See? All their tents are still standing."

That was true enough. "Besides," Ylia went on, "we don't know what Retoc is planning in the city. You can reach it faster by skiff. I'll go back for Bylanus on foot."

The logic of what Ylia said could not be refuted. With sinking heart Bram Forest helped her from the skiff. He kissed her quickly. "I love you, Ylia," he said.

"And I love you, Bram Forest."

"Be careful. Keep hidden in the rushes. Tell Bylanus to use his judgment in attacking or waiting for Retoc's legions to make the first move."

Ylia's pretty head nodded. Then she ducked into the rushes and was gone. Bram Forest looked after her until the rustling in the rushes stopped, then he poled the skiff once more out into the center of the river and sped swiftly toward the Gates of Ice.

No one stopped him. No guards were posted. He beached the skiff and sprinted through the gates and through the city and up its biggest hill toward the amphitheater. Then, only a jek's distance away, he heard the crowd at the funeral games. They roared suddenly in a frenzy of excitement and another part of Portox's poem slipped into place. The crowd watching the games in Nadia City was the raging beast, blood-lusting, expectant, animal-savage, whipped into a fever of goggle-eyed enthusiasm and ready to move, *en-masse*, in whatever direction a strong leader might push them.

A strong leader . . .

Retoc? Or Bram Forest? Which one?

Pirum the Abarian shifted his weight uncomfortably, leaning down on the haft of his spear. The whole idea of posting pickets along the bank of the river seemed unnecessary to him. They could not actually see the river through the rushes, and they dared not go closer for fear of being spotted by whatever traffic moved on the icy waters. Then what was the point of them standing here, half-frozen with the cold, waiting

for an assailant who would never come?

And while he was thinking thus, the girl virtually walked into Pirum's arms. At first he heard a faint rustling in the rushes and, before he could investigate, the tallest of the dry plants had parted and a lovely bronze-skinned girl appeared. She turned to run, but Pirum caught her in his muscular arms and held her despite her struggles.

She bit his arm and, with an oath, he caught her hair and twisted her head back. "Who are you?" he said. "Who are you, eh?"

The girl glowered at him.

Pirum dragged her along. She continued to struggle. Shaking his head, he hit her on the jaw with his fist and caught her before she could fall. Then, swinging her up over his broad shoulder, he stalked through the rushes toward Nadia City.

17

The Prison Without Bars

NO ONE tried to stop Bram Forest until he reached the very gates of the amphitheater. But there a guard with drawn whip-sword barred the way and demanded: "You don't look

Nadian to me. What delegation are you with, man?"

Bram Forest had no time to parry words with words. He tried to push his way past the guard who, too surprised to thrust with his weapon, used his free hand to grab Bram Forest by the shoulder and spin him around. Bram Forest drove his left fist into the guard's belly and heard the woosh of air escaping from his lungs.

That was the last thing he heard for some time. A second guard crept up quietly behind him and struck expertly with the hilt of his whip-sword just behind the left ear. Bram Forest fell as if the ground dropped out from under him.

"By all the fiery gods of Tarth, will you look at that!" the first guard exclaimed.

The second guard could only gawk, not comprehending.

The unconscious man was growing tenuous.

The first guard in confused alarm, lashed down with the whip-sword. But its point passed through Bram Forest's now transparent body without meeting any resistance.

"Right through him! Right through him!" cried the guard.

And, by the time he said it, and coiled his sword again, Bram Forest had vanished.

When an urgent message had come for Retoc, the Princess Volna, alone in the royal box, had decided to investigate the matter herself. She had to hurry, though. In not many minutes, Retoc and Bontarc would find themselves face to face on the sands of the amphitheater. Wouldn't Bontarc be surprised! Too proud to flee, not swordsman enough to match the mighty Retoc . . .

"Yes, yes, what is it?" she snapped irritably when she entered the dungeon-like ready-room below the amphitheater sands. She was in a hurry to return to her box, lest she miss the duel between Bontarc and Retoc. Alone in the ready-room was a soldier in the uniform of Abaria.

"Begging your pardon, ma'am," said the soldier. "My message is for Retoc of Abaria."

"And I tell you Retoc of Abaria is not here to receive it." Volna clapped her hands and two of her own guards appeared. "I am the Princess Volna. Well?"

Pirum looked at her, at the armed guards flanking her on either side, at the door

through which she had entered, at the ready-room's second door. "Very well," he said at last, and opened the second door, beckoning.

Volna went to the doorway and looked. She gasped involuntarily, hardly able to believe her eyes. There on the stone floor of a smaller ready-room, only now regaining consciousness, was the Virgin Wayfarer of Ofrid, she who had seen Retoc slay Jlomec, she who had been sent by Volna herself to sure death on the Journey of No Return. Terror gripped her.

"What does this mean?" Volna cried. "Where did you find her? Where, man? Speak!"

"On the river, ladyship."

"On the river? Returning from the Place of the Dead?"

"No, ladyship. Heading toward the Place of the Dead."

Volna went to the girl and stood over her. "You! What's your name?"

"Ylia," the girl said.

"What were you trying to do, Ylia?"

The girl said nothing.

Volna called to Pirum, who came at once. "Hit her," Volna said.

Grasping Ylia by her hair, Pirum struck her face with his open hand. Her head snapped back. The mark of

his fingers was on her face. She said nothing.

"Hit her again," Volna said.

Pirum struck Ylia a second time. The girl whimpered, but held her tongue. "Where is your friend, that giant of a man?" Volna asked.

Again Pirum hit Ylia when she would say nothing. Finally Volna shrugged. "She'll talk, given enough of that. What's *your* name, man?"

"Pirum, ladyship."

"Very well, Pirum. My guards and I are returning to our seats. There is a duel I wouldn't want to miss. All Tarth will reap its consequences. Meanwhile, stay with this girl and do what you must do to make her talk. It might be important."

Pirum bowed. "Yes, ladyship," he said, and watched the others depart. Then, when they were alone, Ylia surprised him by flying at him, nails bared, like a wildcat. He fought off her attack and struck her a savage open-handed blow, and she fell back. At least this, Pirum thought advancing on her, might be an interesting assignment.

"... hit by that cab, mac."

"You all right?"

"He's getting up, ain't he?"

"Jeez, I swear," the sweating taxi driver said to the crowd which had gathered about the prostrate man, "he popped up outa nowhere. One second I'm driving along, looking for a fare, the next, he's standing right in front of me. I almost pushed the brake through the floor, honest, but—"

"Ylia," the stricken man said.

"Hey now, take it easy."

"What he say, anyhow?"

"... be going to a costume ball or something. Lookit that outfit he's wearing, willya? What's he supposed to be, a man from Mars or something? I read in the papers where Mars was pretty close a while back. My kid thinks there are ..."

"Aw, shudap about your kid."

"Need any help, mister?"

"No. No, thank you. I'm all right."

"... got a nasty crack on his head, is all. See? See the blood?"

"He's getting up."

"... a cop. When you don't want 'em, they're around. Now you need them, where in heck are they, that's what I wanna know."

"The bracelet!" the stricken man said in sudden alarm. He stared at his own right

arm in confusion, then his left. His arms were bare.

"You wasn't wearing no bracelet, mac," someone said.

"No bracelet," he said. "No bracelet." His eyes looked vague, confused.

After a while a policeman came and took in the situation at a glance. "All right, all right," he bawled. "Step back and givemair, givemair, will you?"

The crowd dispersed slowly, and the policeman talked for a while with the taxi-driver, then with the stricken man.

"My name?" the stricken man said in answer to a question. "Pram Forest. Yes, Bram Forest. But I don't have the bracelet. The bracelet is gone, forever. Without the bracelet I can't . . ." his voice trailed off.

"He drunk?" the policeman asked the cab driver.

"Search me."

"'A prison without bars,' " the man recited. "Earth is my prison, forever. Ylia. Ylia!"

The driver made a circular motion with his forefinger, in the general vicinity of his temple.

"You both better come down the station house with me," the policeman said.

"Aw, officer, I'll lose some fares."

"Anyhow. The guy talks batty, but he don't look drunk. We got to figure this here out."

"Ylia," the man said, almost as if the sound were a name and he was crying out to the owner of that name across an unthinkable abyss.

Bontarc, King of Nadia, felt as good as could be expected under the circumstances. Now that the first shock of bereavement had passed, he knew no mourning would bring back his dead brother Jlomec. And the sun of TARTH was hot on the amphitheater sands as Bontarc stood awaiting his as yet unknown adversary. He flexed and uncoiled his whip-sword, smiling in expectancy. He was a competent swordsman, among the dozen or so best in Nadia. The duel-to-first-blood would be just what he needed. Win or lose, he'd feel a lot better afterwards. And meanwhile, he was a king, wasn't he? The adulation of the crowd swept down all around him, lifting his spirits. The corpse of Prince Jlomec, treacherously slain, seemed very far away—as, indeed, it was . . .

A roar of expectancy went up from a hundred thousand throats as Bontarc's adver-

sary appeared at the other end of the arena. The sun was dazzling. At first Bontarc saw the swordsman only as a dot across the gleaming sands. But now the roar of expectancy had turned to a groan of dismay, which was followed by a silence, as of death, then an eager whispered buzzing. Why should this be? Why . . .

The figure came closer on the burning sands. Bontarc squinted. Was it possible? He felt a tremor go through his body.

It was Retoc of Abaria!

"To the death, Bontarc," Retoc said softly, savagely, as they approached.

Bontarc shook his head imperceptibly. He was no coward, but knew he was no match for Retoc and didn't see why he should lay down his life on the amphitheater sands. "I'll not fight you to the death, Retoc of Abaria," he said.

Retoc shrugged as if it weren't very important. "Well," he said slowly, "if you don't want to kill the slayer of your brother . . ."

Bontarc charged.

Laughing, Retoc was ready for him.

"... Please . . . please . . . you're just wasting your

time. I . . . won't . . . tell you."

"No?" Pirum said, panting. He saw the girl through a haze of anger, frustration, and desire. She was naked, her lips were bloody, but her eyes still flashed defiance. Pirum, like most Abarians, was something of a sadist.

"Oh, you'll talk," he said. "You'll talk."

"... never . . ."

He dug his strong finger cruelly into her tender body.

"Bram Forest . . ." she cried.

The policeman behind the desk was saying things. Bram Forest heard the droning voice, but not the words. Ylia, he thought. Ylia. A moment before, he actually believed he heard her cry out to him in pain. But that couldn't be. Besides, what could he do about it? He was trapped forever on Earth, without the bracelet which could send him, almost on the wings of thought, back to Tarth, to Ylia, to his destiny.

I love you, girl of Tarth, he thought. *I love you, Ylia, more than words and more than worlds.*

Something whisperingly cold plucked at him, and for an instant his heart was stilled.

Ylia!

Could his love for the girl of Tarth draw him across the unthinkable abyss?

"... immodestly attired and ..." the desk sergeant was saying.

Ylia, Ylia, call me! Draw me to you, girl of Tarth.

... bramforesthelp ...

Ylia! I hear you! I hear you!

"What the heck's he doing? Praying?" the patrolman asked.

For Bram Forest was staring devoutly at nothing, staring at the air in front of his face there in the mundane precinct room as if it held a radiant vision.

Suddenly the desk sergeant's jaw dropped open. The patrolman said: "Hey, wait a mo . . ."

Bram Forest was becoming tenuous, vanishing.

Insubstantial, transparent, the image of Bram Forest soared past the encampment of the Golden Apes. "Bylanus!" he called, and his voice was not insubstantial. Bylanus came at once.

"If the Abarian legions move, attack them, Bylanus."

"As you will, Bram Forest. But you . . ."

"Don't worry about me. I can control it, I can control it."

Bylanus passed an enormous hand through Bram Forest's body.

"I'll materialize, when I find Ylia. She draws me . . ." Already the vision was fading.

"Farewell, Bram Forest."

Farewell . . .

Was it merely the sound of the wind along the banks of the River of Ice? Bylanus wondered.

Something struck Pirus's shoulder. The girl crouched, sobbing, at his feet. Pirus whirled.

His face went white when he saw the man. He swung his fist desperately, and the man blocked it without effort. His arm was caught, as in a vise. He screamed. Something snapped in his arm. Something streaked at his face . . .

He took the blow from Bram Forest's fist under the point of the jaw. His head snapped back against the dungeon wall and memory and desire and lust and life oozed out through his smashed skull.

"Ylia!"

"You came, Bram Forest."

"I'll never leave you again."

"Yes, now, in the amphitheater. I think . . ."

Overhead, the crowd roar-

ed. Bram Forest listened for a fraction of a second, and raced for the stairs.

When word of the duel between Bontarc and Retoc came by courier to Laugrim, second in command of the Abarian army under the missing Hultax, Laugrim decided it was time to attack. He gave the signal for his army to march on the city, and the signal was passed from signal-fire to signal-fire in the huge encampment. In a very short time, the army's vanguard began to march. *There's no force on all Tarth strong enough to stop us now*, Laugrim thought exultantly. *This day, Retoc would rule Tarth.*

He was right. There was no Tarthian army strong enough to stop them. But the Army of the Golden Apes which, after Bram Forest's warning, had deployed itself at the very gates of Nadia City so the people in the amphitheater might witness the battle, was not of Tarth . . .

"Well, Bontarc," cried Retoc, "can't you do better than that? Surely a king . . ."

For many minutes now Retoc, the finest swordsman on Tarth, had been toying with his adversary. He could have killed Bontarc a dozen

times over, but he waited, driving the Nadian ruler back, playing with him, making him do incredible gymnastics in order to survive, three times returning his whip-sword to him when it had been torn from the Nadian's hands.

All Nadia—and all the rulers of Tarth—watched spellbound. It seemed to them that the Nadian ruler had gone into the contest willingly. They made no move, and under the ethics that governed their world, would make no move, to stop the uneven contest.

Retoc's blurring sword-point whipped and flashed, drawing blood from a dozen superficial wounds. The smile never left Retoc's face. Desperately, knowing his life was forfeit whenever Retoc chose, Bontarc parried the whipping blade.

Bram Forest emerged into the dazzling sunlight of the arena floor. Squinting, he saw the figures across the sand.

The men before him were Bontarc of Nadia and Retoc, slayer of his mother, destroyer of Ofridia.

Retoc saw him first, and cried out exultantly. His wrist blurred, his whip-sword flashed, the point singing, and

Bontarc's sword flew from his fingers. "You!" Retoc cried.

The sword-point had slashed an artery on Bontarc's wrist. The blood spurted out and Bontarc stood there, dazed, holding the wound shut with his left hand.

"Are you all right, sire?" Bram Forest asked.

"I can manage until a doctor binds—"

Bram Forest picked up the Nadian ruler's whip-sword and faced his enemy, sword to sword, at last.

Retoc looked at him, and laughed. "I almost killed you once," he said. His hand barely seemed to move, but the point of his blade, whipping, flashing, was everywhere. Bram Forest parried desperately. "I'll finish the job now," Retoc vowed.

Then Bram Forest did an unexpected thing. He used the whip-sword not as a sword: he couldn't hope to match Retoc's skill as a swordsman. He used it as a whip is used, his great arm slicing back and forth through air, up over his head and down, the long length of the uncoiled blading whipping and darting like something alive across the sands.

Retoc retreated two steps,

and lunged with what he hoped would be a death blow.

Proklam the seneschal was trembling so much he could hardly stand. Just outside the amphitheater, in the very shadow of the amphitheater wall, the great Golden Apes of legend had materialized. There were thousands of them, and they were three times the size of men, and methodically and with great ease, they were destroying the Abarian army before it could enter the amphitheater.

Without the Abarian army, Volna and Retoc would never subjugate Nadia, never rule Tarth. But Proklam the seneschal had committed himself to their cause. Now only death awaited him.

Or, had he committed himself? Couldn't he change sides before it was too late? Couldn't he slay Volna, here in the royal box, for all to see? Couldn't he become a hero of the people? He was confused. He wished he could think clearly, but he was more frightened than he had ever been in his life. There was something wrong with his logic. Something . . . Well, no matter. Slay Volna first, call her traitor, and then worry about his logic—

He turned away from the wall and marched down the

flights of stairs between the citizens of Nadia, flanked in two wildly shouting mobs on either side of the aisle, and plunged a knife into Volna's back, killing her instantly.

The people roared, and rose up. Like a tide they swept toward Proklam, the seneschal who had wanted to be prime minister.

"No, no!" he cried. "No, please. You don't understand. . . . I see it now . . . what was wrong with my thinking . . . you don't know yet . . . you don't know . . . to you she was still the Princess Volna, loyal, true . . . you don't understand, please."

The wave rolled over Proklam the seneschal, leaving him battered and bloody and dead in its wake.

The strong, whipping motion of Bram Forest's arm made a wall of steel of his whip-sword. Try as he might, with all the skill at his command, Retoc could not dent that wall. But, he thought, there was another way. Slowly, desperately, he maneuvered Bram Forest back toward Bontarc, who was sitting in the sand and using all his remaining energy to hold the life blood in his veins, his fingers clamped, vise-like, about his own arm.

Bram Forest's arm blurred up, down, to either side. He wove a web of death. It was brawn against skill, he knew—and the strength of his arm might win! Retoc was sweating. Retoc was not the cool swordsman he had been moments before. Desperately, Retoc sought an opening, and found none. True, his superior footwork was forcing Bram Forest back across the sand, but what did that matter? Last time they dueled he had made the mistake of meeting Retoc on his own grounds as greatest swordsman of Tarth. This time . . .

His legs caught against something. He fell heavily.

Retoc's sword-point flashed down.

Bram Forest rolled over, stood up with sand blinding his eyes. For precious moments he could see nothing but could only spin with the whip-sword, slashing air in all directions, hoping Retoc couldn't strike through the wall of steel.

Then, slowly, vision returned to his stinging eyes. Bontarc lay stretched out on the sand now, unconscious, the blood pumping from his severed artery. If he bled like that for more than a few moments, he would die. If he died, and if Nadia rose in its

wrath against Abaria, then all that Bram Forest had dreamed of, not revenge against Abaria for a wrong done, but eternal peace on Tarth, would be lost . . .

He took the offensive, weaving his wall of steel toward Retoc. The Abarian thrust his own sword, and withdrew it, and parried, and lunged and thrust again. The wall of steel which was Bram Forest's singing blade advanced relentlessly.

Round and round his head, Bram Forest whirled the whip-sword. Retoc could—just—block the motion, the death-laden circle, with his own blade. He became accustomed to it. He used all his effort, all his skill to block it.

Then, abruptly, Bram Forest raised his swordarm and brought it down from high over his head.

Retoc screamed.

And died screaming, his head and torso split from crown to navel.

Bram Forest rushed to Bontarc, stretched out on the sand, and with his own hand stemmed the bleeding.

Bylanus the Golden Ape said: "All Tarth is yours to command if you wish it, Bram Forest."

"No, Bylanus. Take your people back to your world

and live in peace. We of Tarth thank you."

Bylanus smiled. "I thought you would say that."

"Portox was a great scientist," Bram Forest said. "But he thought too much of revenge. The ancient wrong is righted."

"Then you'll spare Abaria?" gasped the delegate of the assembled Tarthian nobles, who had come to the meeting called by Bylanus that night.

"My fight was with Retoc and the Abarian army. Retoc is dead, the army decimated and disbanded. My fight with Abaria is over."

"Then what will you do?"

Bram Forest took Ylia's hand. "I'd like to see a great nation rise again on the Plains of Ofrid."

Bontarc, his arm bandaged, said: "My people will help you build. And, with your wayfarers as a nucleus, maid Ylia . . ."

"It will be a small nation at first," Ylia said.

"It will grow, so long as Tarth knows peace," Bontarc told her.

"Tarth will know nothing but peace from now on," Bram Forest promised.

It was a promise which he knew all of them would keep.

THE END

S. R. O.

By ELLIS HART

It was easy to exploit the strange visitors from space. They'd never heard of a contract and didn't know the meaning of money. "It's too good to be true," Bart said. And he was right. It was.

BART CHESTER was walking down Broadway when it materialized out of black nothing.

He was giving Eloise the line, with the, "No, honest to God, Eloise, I mean if you come over to my place, we'll have just *one*—s'help me, just *one*—then we'll be off to the show." He was acutely aware there might not be any show that night, chiefly because there was no money that night, but Eloise didn't know that. She was a sweet girl and Bart didn't want to spoil her with luxuries.

Bart was just figuring mentally how many it would take to get Eloise's mind off a show and onto more earthy matters, when the whine began.

Like a thousand generators

spinning at top-point efficiency the sound crawled up the stone walls encasing Times Square; bouncing back and back, reverberating thunderously amid the noise of Broadway, causing heads to turn, eyes to lift.

Bart Chester turned his head, lifted his eyes, and was one of the first to see it shimmer into existence. The air seemed to pinken and waver, like heat lightning far off. Then the air ran like water. It may have been in the eyes, or actually in the air, but the air *did* run like water.

The sly gleam faded from Bart Chester's eyes, and he never did get that "little one" with Eloise. He turned away from her splendid charms, realizing, knowing, sensing that he had a place



Earth had never seen such diversified talent.

in what was coming. Others must have felt the same way, for traffic on the sidewalks was slowing, people turning to stare into the evening darkness. All seemed awed by the sight.

The coming was rapid. The air quavered a bit more, and a form began to take shape, as a ghost emerging from mist. The shape was long, and cylindrical, protruberated and shining. It materialized over Times Square.

Bart took three rapid steps to the edge of the sidewalk, his eyes searching into the glare of neons, trying to see more of that weird structure. People jostled him and a knot began to form, as though he were a catalyst for some chemical action.

The *thing* (and Bart Chester had been in show business too long to jump at snap labels) hung there, suspended by hangings of nothing, as if waiting. It stretched up out between the trench of buildings, towering a good ten feet over the tallest one. The structure—whatever it was—appeared to be over nine hundred feet high. It hung above the ground, over the traffic island dividing Broadway and Seventh Avenue, the flickering of a mil-

lion lights coloring its smooth tube body.

Even as he watched, the seemingly unbroken skin of the structure parted circularly and a flat plate emerged. The plate was dotted with small holes, and in another instant a thousand metallic filaments pushed through the holes. Rigidly, they weaved in the air.

Newspaper stories of the last few years, coupled with a natural childlike credulousness, joined. *Migod*, thought Chester, and somehow knew his assumption was correct, *they're testing the atmosphere! They're finding out if they can live here!* When he had said this to himself, the greater implication struck him: *it's a spaceship! That—that thing came from another planet! Another planet?*

It had been many months since the Emery Bros. Circus, in which Bart had sunk all his ready cash, had folded. It had been many months since Bart had paid his rent, and not many less since he'd had three full meals in one twenty-four-hour period. He was desperately looking for an angle. Any angle!

Then, with the innate entrepreneur blood coursing through him beating fiercely, he thought joyously, *Good*

God, what an attraction this would make!

Concessions. Balloons saying "Souvenir of the Space-ship." Popcorn, peanuts, Cracker Jacks, binoculars, pennants! Food! Hot dogs, candied apples; what a pitch! What a perfect pitch!

If I can get to it first, he added, mentally clicking his fingers.

He hardly saw the wildly gesturing policeman using his call box. He hardly heard the mixed screams and murmurs of the thronging crowds watching the metal filaments weaving their patterns. He elbowed back through the crowd.

Faintly, through the rising crowd noise, he heard Eloise moaning his name. "Sorry, baby," he yelled over his shoulder, putting his elbow into a fat woman's diaphragm, "but I've been hungry too long to pass up a sweet deal like this!"

"Excuse me, ma'am. Pa'rm me, Mac. Excuse me, I'd like to get—uh—through here. Uh! Thanks, Mac," and he was at the drug store door. He adjusted his bow tie for a moment, muttering low to himself, "Ohboyohboyohboy! Just looka this, little Bartie Chester! You're gonna make a millyun bucks! Yessir!"

He scrambled for change as he slid into the booth. In another few minutes he had placed the long distance call—collect—to Mrs. Charles Chester in Wilmington, Delaware. He heard the phone ringing at the other end, then his mother's voice, "Yes, hello?" and he started to say, "Hey! Ma!" but the operator's voice cut through.

"Will you accept the charges, Mrs. Chester?"

When she had said yes, Bart threw himself into it. "Hello, hello, Ma! How ya?"

"Why, Bart, how wonderful to hear from you. It's been so long! Just those few postcards!"

"Yeah, yeah, I know, Ma," he cut her off, "but things have been really jumpin' for me here in New York. Look, Ma, I need some money."

"Well . . . how much, Bart? I can let you have . . ."

"I'll need a couple hunnerd, Ma. It's the biggest—this is so hot it's burnin' my pinkies! Honest to—" he caught himself quickly, "—gosh! Ma, I need the dough like I never did before. I can get it back to you in a few months, Ma! Pleeze, Ma! I never asked ya for nothin' before!"

The next two minutes were a gradual wearing-down pe-

riod in which Mrs. Charles Chester promised to go to the bank and get the last two hundred in sight. Bart thanked her most graciously. He ignored the operator's snide interjections to his mother waiting for charges *she* would have to pay, then he was off the line and back on another.

"Hello, Erbie? This is Bart. Look, I got a deal on that is without a doubt the most—*wait* a minute, for heaven's sake, willya—this is the greatest thing ever hit the—"

Five minutes and five hundred dollars later: "Sandy, baby? Who's *this*? Who ya think? This's Bart! Bart Ches—HEY! don't hang up! This is a chance for you to make a millyun; a sweet honest-to-goodness millyun! Now here's what I want. I wanta borrow from you—"

Fifteen minutes, six phone calls and four thousand five hundred and twenty dollars later, Bart Chester bolted from the drug store, just in time to see the tentacled plate receding into the ship, the skin closing again.

Eloise was, of course, gone. Bart didn't even notice.

The crowds were by this time overflowing into the

streets — though everyone was careful not to get under the structure—and traffic blocked to a standstill all up the avenue. Motorists were perched on car hoods, watching the machine.

Fire trucks had been drawn up somehow. Rubber-overcoated firemen stood about biting their lower lips and shaking their heads ineffectually. *I've gotta get in there; get the edge on any other promoters!* Visions of overflowing steam - tables danced in Bart Chester's head.

As he was pushing through the crowd, back to the curb, he saw the police cordon forming. The beefy, spectacled cop was joining hands with a thin, harassed-looking bluecoat, as Chester got to them.

"Sorry, buddy, you can't go in there. We're shoo'in' everyone out now," the fat officer said, over his shoulder.

"Look, officer, I *gotta* get in there." At the negative shake from the cop, Chester exploded, "Look—I'm Bart Chester! You know, Star Cavalcade of 1954, the Emery Bros. Circus—I produced 'em! I *got* to get in there!" He could tell he was making no impression whatsoever.

"Look, you've got to—"

Hey! Inspector! Hey, over here!" He waved frantically, and the short man in the drab overcoat paused as he headed toward the squad car pool.

Taking care not to step on the microphone cables being laid along the street, he walked toward the crowd. Chester said to the cops, "Look, I'm a friend of Inspector Kesselman. Inspector," he said imploringly, "I've got to get in there. It's real important. Maybe a promotion!"

Kesselman began to shake his head no, then he looked at Chester with narrowed eyes for a moment, remembering free tickets to the fights, and reluctantly bobbed his head in agreement. "Okay, come on," he said, with obvious distaste, "but stay close."

Chester ducked under the restraining arms of the cops, following the little man around the shadow of the structure.

"How's the promoting business, Chester?" asked the inspector as they walked.

Bart felt his head grow light and begin to float off his shoulders. *That* was precisely the trouble: "Lousy," he said.

"Come over some night for dinner, if you get the time,"

added the inspector, in a tone that suggested Bart turn down the invite.

"Thanks," said Bart, carefully walking around the huge machine's shadow in the street.

"Is it a spaceship?" asked Chester, in almost a childlike tone. Kesselman turned and looked at him strangely.

"Where did you get *that* idea from?" he asked.

Chester shrugged his shoulders, "Oh, just them comic books I been readin'." He smiled lopsidedly.

"You're crazy," said Kesselman, shaking his head as he turned away.

Two hours later, when the last firemen had come down from the ladders, shaken their heads in failure and said, "Sorry, these acetylene torches don't even get the metal smoky," and walked away, Kesselman still looked at Chester with annoyance and said, "You're crazy."

An hour later, when they had ascertained definitely that machine-gun bullets did not even dent the structure, he was less sure, but he refused to call the scientists Chester suggested. "Dammit, Chester, this is *my* business, not yours, now either you keep your trap shut, or I'll

boot you out beyond the cordon!" He gestured meaningfully at the throbbing crowds straining against the joined hands of the police. Chester subsided, confident they would do as he had suggested, eventually.

Eventually was one hour and fifty minutes later when Kesselman threw up his hands in despair and said, "Okay, get your experts in here, but do it fast. This thing might settle any minute."

"Or," he added sarcastically, looking at the grinning Bart Chester, "if there's monsters in this thing, they may start eating us any minute now."

It was a spaceship. Or at any rate, it was from *someplace* else.

The gray-faced scientists clucked knowingly to each other for a while; one of the braver experts climbed a fire ladder and tested the ship in some incomprehensible manner, and then they concurred.

"It is our opinion," said the scientist with the three snatches of hair erupting from an otherwise bald head, "that this vehicle—am I speaking clearly enough for you reporters?—this vehicle

is from somewhere off Earth. Now whether," he pointed out, while the others nodded in agreement, "this is a spaceship, or as seems more likely from the manner in which it appeared, a dimension-spanning device, I am not certain.

"But," he concluded, making washing movements with his hands, "it is definitely of extraterrestrial origin." He spelled the six-syllable word, and the reporters went whooping off to the telephones.

Chester grabbed Kesselman by the arm. "Look, Inspector, who has say-so—jurisdikshun, *you* know—over this thing? I mean, who would have say-so about entertainment rights and like that?" Kesselman was looking at him as though he were insane. Chester started another sentence, but the screams from the crowd drowned him out. He looked up quickly.

The skin of the spaceship was opening again.

By the time the crowds had streamed into the cross-town streets, terror universally mirrored on every face, but mingled with an overwhelming curiosity. New Yorkers were once again

torn between their native desire to watch, and a fear of the unknown.

Chester and the stubby-legged inspector found themselves walking backward, taking short steps, fearful steps, as they looked upward. *Don't let them be monsters,* Chester was almost praying. *Or that beautiful meal-ticket'll be knocked off by the militia!*

The spaceship was motionless; it had not altered its original position by an inch. But a platform was extending. A transparent platform, so clear and so thin, it seemed almost invisible. Six hundred feet up the ship's length, between two huge ribbed knobs extending as though they were growths, the platform slid out over Times Square.

"Get some guns on that thing!" bellowed Kesselman at his men. "Get up in those buildings!" He pointed at two skyscrapers between which the spaceship hovered.

Chester stared at the ship in fascination as the platform extended—then stopped. As he watched, a note was sounded. It rose in his mind, audibly, yet soundlessly. He cocked his head to one side, listening. He could see police and slowly returning pedes-

trians doing the same. "Whutzat?" he asked.

The sound built, climbing from the hollow arch at the bottom of his feet, to the last inch of each strand of hair on his head. It overwhelmed him and his sight dimmed for a moment, to be replaced by bursting lights and flickering shadows. In an instant his vision cleared, but he knew it had been a preamble. He knew—again without reason—the sound had come from the ship. He turned his eyes to the platform once more, just in time to see the lines begin their forming.

He could never quite describe what they were, and the only thing he knew for certain was that they were beautiful. The lines were suspended in air and of colors he had never known existed. They were parallel and crossed streamers that lived *between* the reds and blues of Earth. They were alien to his sight, yet completely arresting. He could not take his eyes from their wavering, shifting formations.

Then the colors began to seep. Like running paints the lines melted, forming, forming, forming in the air above the platform. The colors intermingled and blended; soon a backdrop of

shades blotted out the skin of the ship.

"What—what is it?" he heard Kesselman ask, faintly.

Before he could answer, *they* came out.

The beings appeared and stood silent for an instant. They were all different in bodily appearance, yet somehow Chester knew they were all alike underneath. As though they had donned coverings. In the instant they stood there, motionless, he knew each by name. The purple-furred one on the left, he was Vessilio. The one with stalks growing where his eyes should have been, he was Davalier. The others, too, all bore names, and oddly, Chester knew each one intimately. They did not repulse him, for all their alienness. He knew Vessilio was stalwart and unflinching in the face of duty. He knew Davalier was a bit of a weakling, prone to crying in private. He knew all this and more. He *knew* each one, personally.

Yet they were all monstrous. Not one was shorter than forty feet. Their arms—when they had arms—were well-formed and properly sized for their bodies. Their legs, heads, torsos the same. But few had arms and legs and torsos. One was a

snail-shape. Another seemed to be a ball of coruscating light. A third changed form and line even as Chester watched, pausing an instant in a strangely unidentifiable middle stage.

Then they began moving.

Their bodies positioned and swayed. They moved around one another, intricately. Chester found himself enthralled. They were magnificent! Their motions, their actions, their attitudes in relation to one another, were glorious. More, they told a story. A deeply interesting story.

The lines shifted, the merged colors changed. The aliens went through involved panoramas of descriptive motion.

Not for a second did Chester consider he might stop watching them. They were something so alien, so different, yet so compelling, he knew he must watch them or forever lose the knowledge they were imparting with their movements.

When the soundless note had sounded again, the colors had faded, the aliens were gone and the platform had slid back, the spaceship was quiet and faceless once more. Chester realized that he was

breathing with difficulty. They had been—well, literally breathtaking!

He glanced at the huge clock on the Times Building. Three hours had elapsed in the space of a second.

The murmurs of the crowd, the strange applause for a performance they could not have fully understood, the feel of Kesselman's hand on his arm, all faded away. He heard the inspector's voice, so whispery in his ear, "Good Lord, how marvelous!" Even that was out of his range now.

He knew, as he had known everything else, just what the ship was, who the aliens were, what they were doing on Earth. He heard himself saying it, quietly, almost with reverence:

"That was a play. They're actors!"

They *were* magnificent, and New York learned it only shortly before the rest of the world got wind of the news. Hotels and shops suddenly found themselves deluged by the largest tourist crowds in years. The city teemed with thousands of visitors, drawn from all over the Earth, who wished to witness the miracle of The Performance.

The Performance was al-

ways the same. The aliens came out onto their platform—their stage, really—every evening at precisely eight o'clock. They were finished by eleven.

During the three hours they maneuvered and postured, they filled their appreciative audiences with mixtures of awe and love and suspense such as no other acting group had ever been able to do.

Theatres in the Times Square area found they had to cancel their evening performances. Many shows closed, many switched to matinee runs and prayed. The Performance went on.

It was uncanny. How each person who watched enraptured could find identification, find meaning; though everyone saw something a little different; though no words were spoken; though no comprehensible motions were made.

It was uncanny. How they could see the actors do the exact same things, over and over, each Performance, and never tire of it—come back to see it again. It was uncanny, yet beautiful. New York took The Performance to its heart.

After three weeks, the army was called away from

the ship—which had done nothing but produce The Performance regularly each evening—to quell a prison riot in Minnesota. In five weeks Bart Chester had made all the necessary arrangements, shoestring - fashion, and was praying things wouldn't fizzle as they had with the Emery Bros. Circus. He was still going without meals, moaning to those who would listen, "What a lousy racket this is—but I got a deal on now that's—"

In seven weeks Bart Chester had begun to make his first million.

No one would pay to watch The Performance, of course. Why should they when they could stand in the streets and see it? But there was still the unfathomable "human nature" factor with which to contend.

There were still those who would rather sit in a gilded box seat, balcony style, hung from the outside of a metropolitan skyscraper (insured by Lloyd's, to be sure!), than stand in a gutter.

There were still those who felt that popcorn and chocolate-covered almonds made preparation of watching more pleasant. There were still those who felt the show

was common if they did not have a detailed program.

Bart Chester, whose stomach had begun to bulge slightly beneath his new chaircoal-gray suit, took care of those things.

Bart Chester Presents was scripted across the top of the programs, and beneath it, simply, The Performance. It was rumored up and down the street that Bart Chester was the new Sol Hurok, and a man which definitely we should all watch!

During the first eight months of The Performance, he made back all the borrowed money he had invested in building-face leases and construction work. Everything from there on out was reasonably clear profit. The confection and souvenir concessions he leased for a fifty percent cut of the gross to the people who supplied ball games and wrestling matches.

The Performance went on, regularly, as an unquestionable smash hit.

VARIETY said: ETs Socko In Plush Revue!

The *Times* was no less ebullient with its praise: "... we found the Performance on Times Square as refreshing and captivating at its first anniversary as it was

on its opening night. Even the coarse commercial interests which have infected it could not dim the superlativeness of the . . ."

Bart Chester counted his receipts and smiled; and grew fat for the first time in his life.

The two thousand, two hundred and eighty-ninth Performance was as brilliant and as satisfying as the first, the hundredth, or the thousandth. Bart Chester sat back in his plush seat, only vaguely aware of the stunning girl beside him. Tomorrow she would be back, trying to get a break in some off-Broadway production, but tomorrow The Performance would still be there, pouring money into his pockets.

The major part of his mind concentrated, held in awe and wonder at the intricacy and glory of the actors' movements. A minor segment was thinking, as it always did with him.

Wonderful! Marvelous! A true spectacle like The New Yorker said! All around him, like perspiration on a huge beast, the Chester Balconies clung to their buildings. The inexpensive seats between 45th and 46th Streets, the higher priced boxes dotting

the buildings all the way up to the Times Building. *One of these days those guys'll break down and I'll be able to build on the Times, too!* he thought.

Over six years; what a run! Beats South Pacific! Dammit, wish I could have made all that in gate receipts.

He frowned mentally, thinking of all the people watching from the streets. For free! The crowds were still as huge as the first day. People never seemed to tire of seeing the play. Over and over they watched it, enraptured, deep in it, not even noticing the flow of time. The Performance always satisfied, always enchanted.

They're fabulous players, he thought. *Only . . .*

The thought was half-formed. Nebulous. Annoying, but strangely, strangely annoying—there was no reason why he should feel qualms.

Oh, well.

He concentrated on the play. It really took little concentration, for the actors spoke directly to the mind; their charming appeal was to a deeper and clearer well than mere appreciation.

He was not even aware when the tone of the play changed. At one point the actors were performing a

strangely exotic minuet of movement. A second later, they were all down near the front of the platform.

"That isn't in the play!" he said, incredulously, the mood broken. The beautiful girl beside him grabbed at his sleeve.

"What d'ya mean, Bart?" she asked.

He shook her hand off in annoyance. "I've seen this show hunnerds of times. Right here they all get around that little hump-backed bird-thing and stroke it. What're they staring at?"

He was correct. The actors were looking down at their audience who had begun to applaud nervously, sensing something was wrong. The aliens watched with stalks, with cilia, with eyes. They were staring at the people in the streets, on the balconies, seeming to see them for the first time since they'd arrived. Something was very wrong. Chester had felt it first—perhaps because he had been there from the beginning. The crowds were

beginning to sense it also. They were milling in the streets, uncertainly.

Chester found his voice tight and high as he said, "There's—there's something *wrong*! What're they doing?"

When the platform sank slowly down the face of the ship, till finally one of the actors stepped off into the empty space beside the machine, he began to realize.

It was only after the first few moments, when the horror of the total carnage he knew was coming, had worn off, and he found himself staring fascinated as the little, forty-foot, hump-backed bird-thing strode through Times Square, that he knew.

It had been a wonderful show, and the actors had appreciated the intense interest and following of their audience. They had lived off the applause for over six years. They were artists without a doubt.

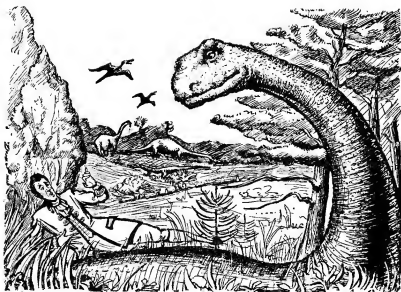
And up to a point, they had *starved* for their art.

THE END

LOOK FOR MARCH

FANTASTIC

NOW ON SALE • IT'S MONTHLY



ESCAPE ROUTE

By LEE ARCHER

*The guilty Lord found a way to escape relentless Destiny,
not knowing that the act of escaping was Destiny itself.*

THE guillotine mobs made a thorough search through Galiopolis, storming the Twenty Towers, dragging out the Lords and their executioners, holding mass slayings in the squares. Their bloodthirsty cries rose round and round the diamond-studded Towers, as they slew each

of the Lords in his turn.

One Lord had escaped. His spy-network had warned him the peasantmen were growing disquiet. The last complement of children taken from the peasant homes for the Arena had set them up again. They were thirsting for blood, so he had fled, escap-

ing the horrible death his brothers were to meet. He had escaped to the edge of the city, where he had dug a hurried pit in the ground, beneath the overshadowing, concealing branches of a fir tree.

Calgarth of the Red Hair watched from his pit, dug near the edge of the Great Forest, and saw the peasantmen killing his fellow rulers. His hard, uncompromising features knotted as he saw his half-brother Wanzor of the Delicate Phrasings being hauled to the guillotine platform by two burly, slobbering peasantmen.

He stared unmoving from the comparative sanctity of his hole in the ground, as the newly-freed peasants thrust Wanzor's head down into the block niche. He watched as the two burly peasantmen grasped Wanzor's arms tightly, pulling them out from his body, rigidly, till the Lord was tight to the block. There was a guttural cry from the executioner in lower Galliop, and the bright, glistening blade slashed down in its tracks.

It lifted immediately, smeared roundly with crimson.

The head bounced to the

platform, and rolled idly off, onto the ground, where a horde of peasantmen began kicking it, screaming, "Football, football, football!" Calgarth felt a sodden lump rise in his throat, and he screwed his eyes shut tightly, blotting out the scene. When he opened them, they had cleaned the blade, had dumped the headless, flowing body atop a stack of the same, and were dragging Tiamijay the Haughty up the steps.

"I've got to get out of here," he murmured to himself. The peasantmen had risen in revolt against the thousand-year rule of himself and his Brother Lords, and here, within the space of a few hours, his world had been shattered. By now they had opened his treasure rooms and scattered his diamonds, killed his hundred concubines, slaughtered his matched teams of horses and panthers. Perhaps there *had* been a few extra beatings and public executions of late, perhaps there *had* been a shortage of food in the peasant villages, perhaps the tariffs on plasteel and boron-compounds *had* been stricken up, perhaps they *had* recruited a larger group of peasantmen for the Arena, but that was no reason for an unlawful

uprising of this sort. All the measures had been taken for the good of the planet, for the rule of the Royal Lords. There would be serious measures of retribution, too, when the peasantmen found they could not rule themselves, and called for their Lords to return.

His mind whirled as he watched Lord after Lord going beneath the blade, till finally they were all dead. All fifty-nine of them. All but himself, and he knew only his premonitions of danger and the tight spy-network had saved him. With his Brother Lords gone, it was obvious they would hunt him down. He *had* to get away.

There was only one way, and he feared even that.

But it was the only way, and desperation moved him abruptly.

He waited till night had descended, and the peasantmen's electrotorches had moved into the Great Forest surrounding the city of Galipolis. He waited till the blood-hungry mobs had divided into hunt-groups and moved away from the city to find him. He knew, now, they would never rest till they had found the last of the Brother Lords, and sent him the way of his fellow rulers. He wait-

ed, crouched uncomfortably in the hole, his blued-steel firer held steadily at the darkness, waiting for a peasantman's piggish face to discover him.

He waited and waited, but they seemed to have taken other routes, seemed to have bypassed him in the darkness. He silently blessed his forethought in digging such a refuge. It had saved his life.

Then, when the sounds of the peasantmen crashing through the brush had faded behind and around him, he left the refuge of the pit beneath the ground-scraping branches, and made his way cautiously into the city.

He had to get to the Experimental Buildings.

The Professor had survived because he had come up from peasant stock. But even though he had been granted an elevated position in the Lord's culture, still he knew his place. He knew who was of the royal crèche, and who was not. So now he cowered in fear as Calgarth held the firer on him.

Hate danced in the Professor's eyes, but he knew he was helpless before the power of that tiny weapon. He knew the Lord from before the revolt, knew him as a

ruthless, sadistic man who could kill without compunction, ruin without remorse. He stared sullenly but silently at the man who had ruled him, and wished fervently there was some way he could kill him, to complete the job the peasantmen had begun.

Calgarth sat down on a low experiment-shelf, aiming the firer directly at the Professor's face. "You will send me back, Professor. These experiments will at last pay off. I have been subsidizing you for too long . . . but now I'll collect.

"You will send me back one hundred years, and if you do not, I will surely flame you." He spoke in a soft, steady voice, though inside himself he roiled and quaked. He let his words emerge slowly, and pacedly, perhaps even a bit stiltedly, to let the old man know he was quite serious.

"But, Lord Calgarth," the nearly-bald scientist said, indicating the time-stress banks, "we have not yet perfected the machine. We can only send you to one time and position; to the dawn of man—and beyond."

The Lord watched the scientist with narrowed eyes. "Why is that?"

The old man replied with dark fear in his voice. "We don't quite know. But we've sent men back and we've brought them forward again, with no difficulty. We just haven't been able to develop calibrations for in-between. The furthest back we can send, the only time we can send, is the Jurassic period of Earth's antiquity, 16,000 years ago."

"Well, can you bring me back, after a suitable amount of time has elapsed here?"

The Professor scratched at his lower lip, the glimmering of an idea forming. He tried to conceal his hatred of this man before him, and twisted his fingers together. It was obvious he was more than nervous in the Lord's presence.

"Yes, my Lord. You remain in the stress field, no matter where you go in that era. We can bring you back at any time."

"Then you will do it," Calgarth said emphatically, lowering the firer as he slid off the experimental shelf.

"But . . ."

"*You will do it!*" Calgarth snapped. Adding, "And hear me, Professor. I have a trusted agent still at large, who will remain at large. He will watch the situation, and if

you do not bring me back when all this," he waved his hand toward the outside of the Experimental Buildings, "is over, he will not kill you . . . oh, no, but he *will* kill your wives and children."

The Professor paled. It had all been bluff, but the old man could not know this. He felt the flames of loathing burn higher in his stomach, and he realized this Lord was a worthless animal, who should be killed as quickly as possible. Even in the Jurassic he was dangerous!

But he was old, and easily terrified. He would do it. "All right. You win, my Lord. Come with me."

He led the Lord Calgarth of the Red Hair down the halls to the room where the time-stress machine itself had been set up, and indicated the hard-faced man should mount to the stage.

Standing in the glare of the neon beams, the Lord had a moment's hesitation. "What about those . . . those dinosaurs and other things?"

"The area you will be set down in, my Lord, is very sparsely inhabited by animal life of any kind. There is food for you, and water that is safe—my men who have gone back report this to me—but

the animals are primarily of the vegetation-eating kind. There is a great herd of Brontosaurii there, but they will not touch meat, will eat only swamp grass. You are safe on that score."

"Then send me!" the Lord snapped.

The Professor hid his glee, letting the hatred burn in his old, tired eyes for only a moment, then shrugged, turned to his switches, slammed them home.

All through the building, from down the halls, the time-stress banks whined and screamed their fury.

The Lord's final words, before he flicked out of existence, hung on the air. "Remember, Professor, if you don't bring me back . . . Death!"

Then the lights flared higher, their colors flattened out, the air wavered . . .

And he was gone.

He appeared in the center of a huge, high-flung jungle, steaming pits of mud and soft, spongy ground surrounding him.

Overhead he heard a scream and a winged lizard with a huge narrow beak of teeth ripped across the sky, leathery wings flailing at the treetops. The air was hot and

vital with the scent of rotting vegetation and animal refuse. He looked around him, raising the firer warily.

Off through the tangled mat of vines and trees he could see a large herd of dark, gray-colored lizards moving toward him. They stomped and crushed the earth flat with each quaking step of their monstrous round feet. They were gigantic, towering nearly thirty feet above him. He stepped back a bit, terror rising like an arrow in his throat.

These beasts were terrifying, unimaginable, gigantic and . . . approaching. One was almost upon him, ahead of the rest.

He remembered, then, what the Professor had said about a Brontosaurus not eating meat.

He thought it right up to the instant the gigantic beast lunged—thinking it would turn aside at any instant—and made a grab for him. He fell back, falling into the foul, stinking mud, and the firer fell from his hand, lost in the pits of sticky brown quagmire.

Then he realized that the Professor probably *had* been correct, that a brontosaurus *wouldn't* eat meat, and

couldn't eat meat because its neck was too long and thin . . . but that was only if the beast could *recognize* meat! If a thing from the future plopped down before it, it would have to experiment, its reflexes failing in this utterly new situation, and by experimenting, could rip off Colgarth's arm, or crush him.

How was it to know what was meat and what was not?

He struggled in the engulfing mud, trying desperately to find the firer. The beast had drawn its idiot's head up, up, up, the flat brow of it against the sky, and was preparing for another strike.

Then Calgarth felt the metal of the firer in the mud, drew it forth and thanked his Gods that the weapon was all one piece, sealed against moisture. The Brontosaurus arched its long neck and the head plummeted down like a bullet.

Calgarth fired.

The head exploded in a blaze of flame and a ripping of flesh. Bits of skin and bone spattered across the jungle, and the smell of blood and death was clogging his nostrils.

He scrambled back out of the way as the dead beast fell, shaking the soggy ground with its impact. The thing

lay there and twitched, its huge, thick tail smashing at the ground in a death convulsion that sprayed mud and muck across Calgarth's frightened face.

He watched for another moment, then turned to run before the rest of the herd could spot him.

They were waiting behind him.

"How did you get here!"

The fifty peasantmen edged forward, their electro-torches and spears aimed at him. One of them at the front, a pig-faced man with warts on his cheeks, laughed hollowly. "The Professor was dying. He waited twenty years, and knew there was no other agent, knew his family was safe. He knew he was dying, but he wanted to get *you*, Lord Calgarth."

The peasantman spat the word Lord as though it were filth.

Another chimed in, "He knew he would be dead before he could bring us back, but there wasn't a man of us who wouldn't volunteer, even knowing we would die here!"

They all looked about them at the turbulent jungle of the past that surrounded them.

"But . . . but . . . twenty years . . ."

"All time is as one time in

the past, Lord Calgarth," a third peasantman said, and he hurled his spear directly at the Lord.

The heavy instrument twanged through the air, and struck the Lord high in the chest. A gout of blood spurted from him, crimsoning the ground, as the spear went directly through, and the point protruded from his back.

He stood silently for a moment, the firer at his side, and queerly, strangely, oddly, for no reason at all, the one thought that passed through his head was: *What will the archeologists think when they find all these strange skulls in a strata of Earth fifteen thousand years old? What will they wonder? How will they explain it?*

Then he fell face first into the mud, the shaft of the spear sliding into him, and rising from his back like some ghastly flag pole.

The peasantmen stood and stared, knowing they would die here, also, but none of them wondering about it.

They had come through this escape route to accomplish a mission, and it had been accomplished.

The Lord Calgarth of the Red Hair lay near the dead Brontosaurus. Both would be found together.

THE END

A "JOHNNY MAYHEM"
ADVENTURE

THINK YOURSELF TO DEATH

By C. H. THAMES

WHEN he reached Ophiuchus, Johnny Mayhem was wearing the body of an elderly Sirian gentleman.

Nothing could have been more incongruous. The Sirian wore a pinc-nez, a dignified two-piece jumper in a charcoal color, sedate two-tone boots and a black string-tie.

The loiterers in the street near the Galactic Observer's building looked, and pointed, and laughed. Using the dignity of the dead Sirian, whose body he wore like other people wear clothing, Johnny Mayhem ignored them. They had a point, of course. It was hot and humid on Ophiuchus IX. The loiterers in the dusty, evil-smelling streets wore nothing but loin cloths.

Mayhem went inside the building, which was air-con-

If you've never read a Johnny Mayhem story before, you are in for a treat. Johnny, who wears different bodies the way ordinary people wear clothes, is one of the most fascinating series characters in science fiction.

ditioned. Probably it was the only air-conditioned structure on the entire planet. Mayhem dabbed at his Sirian forehead gratefully, mopping at sweat. As near as he could figure, his life expectancy in this body was down to three days, Earth style. He wondered fleetingly why the Galactic League had sent him here to Ophiuchus. He shrugged, knowing he would find out soon enough.

The Galactic Observer on Ophiuchus IX, a middle-aged Indian from Bombay named Kovandaswamy, wore an immaculate white linen loin cloth on his plump body and a relieved smile on his worried face when Mayhem entered his office. The two men shook hands.

"So you're Mayhem?" Ko-



The crazed mob was bent upon rapine and murder.

vandaswamy said in English. "They told me to expect you, sir. Pardon my staring, but I've never been face to face with a legend before. I'm impressed."

Mayhem laughed. "You'll get over it."

"Well, at least as a Sirian gentleman, you're not very prepossessing. That helps."

"It wasn't my idea. It never is."

"I know. I know that, sir." Kovandaswamy got up nervously from his desk and paced across the room. "Do you know anything about Ophiuchus IX, Mayhem?"

"Not much. It's one of the Forgotten Worlds, isn't it?"

"Precisely, sir. Ophiuchus IX is one of scores of interstellar worlds colonized in the first great outflux from Earth."

"You mean during the population pressure of the 24th century?"

"Exactly. Then Ophiuchus IX, like the other Forgotten Worlds, was all but forgotten. As you know, Mayhem, the first flux of colonization receded like a wave, inertia set in, and the so-called Forgotten Worlds became isolated from the rest of the galaxy for generations. Only in the past fifty years are we find-

ing them again, one by one. Ophiuchus IX is typical, isolated from the galaxy at large by a dust cloud that—"

"I know. I came through it."

"It was colonized originally with Indians from southern and eastern India, on Earth. That's why the Galactic League appointed me Observer. I'm an Indian. These people—well, they're what my people might have developed into if they'd lived for hundreds of years in perfect isolation."

"What's the trouble?"

Kovandaswamy answered with a question of his own. "You are aware of the Galactic League's chief aim?"

"Sure. To see that no outworld, however small or distant, is left in isolation. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes," agreed Kovandaswamy. "Their reason is obvious. For almost a thousand years now the human race has outpaced its social and moral development with development in the physical sciences. For almost a thousand years mankind has had the power to destroy itself. In isolation this is possible. With mutual interchange of ideas, it is extremely unlikely. Thus, in the interests of human survival, the Galactic

League tries to thwart isolated development. So far, the Forgotten Worlds have cooperated. But Ophiuchus IX is an exception."

"And the League wants me to find out why?"

"Precisely."

"How are they thwarting—"

Kovandaswamy was sweating despite the air-conditioning, despite his almost-naked state. "You have the right to turn this mission down, of course. The League told me that."

"I'm here," Mayhem said simply.

"Very well, sir. Sooner or later, every outworlder who ventures out among the Ophiuchans kills himself."

"I guess I didn't hear you. Did you say kills himself?"

"Suicide, Mayhem. Exactly."

"But how can you blame—"

"Like their ancestors from the Earthian sub-continent of India, Mayhem, the Ophiuchans are mystics. The trance, the holy man who sits in contemplation of his navel, the World Spirit—these are the things of their culture most important to them. Mayhem, did you ever see a hundred holy men of India working together?"

"Usually they don't work together."

"Precisely, sir. Precisely. Here on Ophiuchus, they do. And not merely a hundred. All of them. Virtually all of them. Working together, their minds in trance, unified, seeking their World Spirit, they can do amazing things."

"Like mentally forcing the outworlders to kill themselves?"

"Yes, sir. Legally, they are innocent. Morally, they do not recognize the outworlders as equals of themselves. The League wants to know what they are trying to hide. It could be a threat to peace and—existence."

"You have a body for me?" Johnny would be ready with that provided.

If anyone but Johnny Mayhem had asked that question, Kovandaswamy would not have known what he was talking about, or would have thought him insane, or both. But Johnny Mayhem was, of course, the legendary Man Without a Body. How many corporeal shells had he inhabited in the past half dozen years? He shrugged, not remembering. He couldn't remain in one body more than a month: it would mean the final death of his *elan*, his

bodiless sentience. So far he had avoided that death.

The Galactic League would help him if it could. Every world which had a human population and a Galactic League post, however small, must have a body in cold storage, waiting for Johnny Mayhem if his services were required. But no one knew exactly under what circumstances the Galactic League Council, operating from the hub of the Galaxy, might summon Mayhem. And only a very few people, including those at the Hub and the Galactic League Firstmen on civilized worlds and Observers on primitive worlds, knew the precise mechanism of Mayhem's coming. To others it was a weird mystery.

Johnny Mayhem, bodiless sentience. Mayhem—Johnny Marlow then—who had been chased from Earth, a pariah and a criminal, almost seven years ago, who had been mortally wounded on a wild planet deep within the Sagittarian Swarm, whose life had been saved—after a fashion—by the white magic of the planet. Mayhem, doomed now to possible immortality as a bodiless sentience, an *elan*, which could occupy and activate a fresh

corpse or one which had been frozen properly . . . an *elan* doomed to wander eternally because it could not remain in one body for more than a month without body and *elan* perishing. Mayhem, who had dedicated his strange, lonely life to the service of the Galactic League because a normal life and normal social relations were not possible for him. . . .

"Then you'll do it?" Kovandaswamy asked on Ophiuchus IX. "Even though you realize we can give you no official help not only because the Galactic League approves of your work unofficially but can't sanction it officially, but because an outworlder can't set his foot outside this building for long or off the spacefield without risking death . . ."

"By suicide?"

"Yes. I'm practically a prisoner in Galactic League Headquarters, as is my staff. You see—"

"What about the body?"

Kovandaswamy looked at him nervously. "A native, Mayhem. A native won't be molested, you see."

"That figures. What kind of native?"

"In top shape, sir. Healthy, young, in the prime of life you might say."

"Then what's bothering you?"

"Nothing. Nothing, sir."

"Your technicians are ready?"

"Yes, sir. And vowed to secrecy."

Mayhem found a tiny capsule in the pocket of his Sirian jumper, and popped it in his mouth.

"What—what's that?" Kovandaswamy asked.

Mayhem swallowed. "Curare," he said.

"Curare! A poison!"

"Paralysis," said Mayhem quickly. "Muscular paralysis. You die because you stop breathing. Painless . . . and . . ."

"But—"

"Call your technicians . . . new body . . . ready . . ." Gasping, the Sirian gentleman, hardly Johnny Mayhem now, fell to the floor.

Trembling, Kovandaswamy pressed a button on his desk. A few moments later, two white-coated technicians entered the office.

"Project M," Kovandaswamy said.

Grimly the technicians went to work.

Mayhem awoke.

Ordinarily it was his *elan* alone which journeyed between the worlds, his *elan*

which was fed the information it would need in hypno-sleep while the frozen body was thawed out. Sometimes, however, he came the normal way in a body which still had some of its thirty days left, as he had come to Ophiuchus IX in the Sirian gentleman.

Darkness. The body felt young and healthy. Mayhem wondered vaguely how it had died, then decided it did not really matter. For the next thirty days the body would live again, as Johnny Mayhem.

Recessed lighting glowed at the juncture of walls and ceiling. Mayhem was reclining on a cot. A loin cloth and a large shawl had been laid out for him. On the far wall of the room was a tinted mirror. Mayhem got up and went over there.

What his new body looked like hardly mattered, he told himself. Youth, health, strength—these were important. He could sense them internally. He could . . .

He stared at the image in the mirror. His face turned beet red. He went for the shawl and the loin cloth and put them on. Cursing, he went to find Kovandaswamy.

"Is this supposed to be a joke?" Mayhem demanded.

"You never asked what

the—" Kovandaswamy began.

"How am I supposed to find out anything—like this?"

"It's a young body, a healthy body. It is also the one we were given when the Galactic League first came here. It is the only one we were given."

"Take it or leave it, eh?"

"I'm afraid so, Mayhem."

"All right. All right, I guess I shouldn't complain. It could probably outrun and outfight and outthink the dyspeptic old Sirian gentleman, and things turned out well enough on Sirius III. But it'll probably take most of my time just getting used to it, Kovandaswamy. I'm supposed to be conducting an investigation."

"At least as an Ophiuchan you won't arouse suspicion."

Mayhem nodded slowly, with reluctance. There was nothing else to say. He shook hands with Kovandaswamy and, wearing the loin cloth and the shawl, left the Galactic League building.

With, of course, a completely new identity.

Mayhem walked a mile and a half through hot, arid country. The League building was isolated, as if its inmates might contaminate the native Ophiuchans. Along

the dusty road Mayhem passed a *guru*, the name for a wise man or a holy man first in India and now here on Ophiuchus IX. The guru sat in contemplation of the tip of his nose, legs crossed, soles of feet up, eyes half-closed. The guru remained that way, without moving, until Mayhem was out of sight. The guru behaved in a very un-guru-like manner.

The guru got up quite nimbly, joints creaking, skin dry and cracked. Three strides brought him to a tree with a partly hollow trunk. He lifted a radio transmitter and began to talk.

In twenty generations, the initially small population of Ophiuchus IX, all colonists from India on Earth, had increased geometrically. The colonized planet, now, was as over-populated as the teeming sub-continent which long ago had sent the colonists seeking a new home. As a result, unemployment was chronic, discontent widespread, and whatever inner serenity mysticism might bring was widely sought after. This did not stop the non-mystics, however, of whom there were many, from seeking jobs that could pay

money that could fill empty bellies. . . .

A long line gathered outside the employment office of Denebian Exports the morning after Mayhem had left the League building in his new body. Denebian Exports was the largest outworld company currently on Ophiuchus, a company which had solved the outworlder-suicide problem quite simply by hiring no one but natives. Still, hoots and catcalls surrounded those on the employment line. Other jobless Ophiuchans, apparently preferring near-starvation to working for the outworlders, threatened to make the situation dangerous.

Pandit Gandhi Menon, a lean, handsome Ophiuchan of perhaps thirty years, wished there was some way he could shut his ears to the abuse. He needed work. His father and mother were ill, his child was starving, his wife already dead. The gurus offered their own unique solution, of course. The body is nothing, they said. The mind is everything. But thus had the gurus spoken for four thousand years, on Earth and on Ophiuchus. The great majority of Ophiuchans, Pandit Gandhi Menon included, preferred food for the body to

food for mystic thought. Still, the crowds were ugly, threatening to break up the line of job-seekers if Denebian Exports didn't open its doors soon . . .

An unkempt little man, not old but with a matted growth of beard, an unwashed body which gave the impression of wiry strength, and wild eyes, abruptly flung himself at the young woman in line in front of Pandit.

Shouting, "Not our women, too!" the little man attacked the girl, trying to drag her from the line. "It is bad enough our men, but not our women!"

Pandit caught the fanatic's wiry arm and brought it behind his scrawny back in a hammerlock. "Leave her alone," he said. "If you try that again, I'll break your arm."

The fanatic looked at Pandit with hate in his eyes, but stepped back and stood to one side mouthing invective.

The girl, who was about twenty-five years old, had a livid mark on her arm. She wore loin cloth and shawl, the usual garb. She was, Pandit observed for the first time, quite pretty.

"Thank you," she said. "I—I'm not sure I like work-

ing for the outworlders. But I need the money."

"Don't we all," Pandit told her. "But we're not hired yet. I am Pandit Gandhi Menon."

"Sria Krishna," the girl said, smiling at him. "What sort of work is it?"

"Don't you know, Sria Krishna?"

The girl shook her head and Pandit said: "Actually, I guess I don't know, either. But there are rumors the outworlders want jet-pilots. Not for rocketry. For jets. To fly to the Empty Places."

"The Empty Places? Why?"

Pandit shrugged. "Because they are empty, perhaps. Because they are too dry and too arid to support life. Because Denebian Export can claim whatever it found there, for free export. So go the rumors. But surely you can't pilot a jet."

"Can you?"

"Yes," Pandit said promptly with a faint show of pride.

"My father taught me. I want to thank you for what—"

"Nothing. Anyone in my position would have done it. This rabble—"

The rabble was still noisy. Occasionally they hurled

offal at the stragglers joining the rear of the long line. But Pandit and Sria Krishna stood in the forefront, and presently the door opened. In a few minutes Pandit watched the girl disappear inside. He waited nervously, licking dry lips with a parched tongue. It was early morning, but already very hot. He needed the work. Any work. He needed the money which outworlders could pay so abundantly for honest work. He wondered if the fanatic gurus ever thought of that. Then the door in front of him opened again and a fat, unctuous-looking Ophiuchan came out. He seemed to be an official of sorts.

"One more!" he said. "Only one! The rest of you begone."

Behind Pandit there was a general press of bodies, but he was first in line and did not surrender his position. The unctuous-looking man admitted him, half-expecting a bribe. Pandit passed him by; he didn't have a single copper.

He approached a desk. The crowd noise outside was loud, those who had not joined the line crowding because most of those on it had been turned away. Behind the desk sat a small Dene-

bian man of middle years. He looked nervous.

"Can you fly?" he asked in a voice almost desperately thin.

"Yes," Pandit said. Then the rumors were right.

"How much experience?"

"Five years on and off."

"You have a license?"

"There are no licenses on Ophiuchus IX," Pandit pointed out.

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry. Habit. You people don't lie."

"We try not to."

"Your name?"

Pandit told him. The Denebian wrote it down on a form and said: "You'll do. Pay is twenty credits a mission." It wasn't much, but it was more than Pandit had expected.

"What do we fly?" he asked. Questions didn't seem welcome, but no harm trying.

The Denebian looked at him and laughed. "You want the job?"

"Yes, I want the job."

"Then don't ask questions."

Pandit nodded.

"Out through that door, then. The other new pilots are assembling."

And Pandit left the small office.

A moment later a buzzer sounded on the Denebian's

desk. He spoke into a grid: "Orkap here. Go ahead."

"The guru near the League building reports that a native Ophiuchan left the building heading for the city."

"When was this?"

"Yesterday morning."

"And?"

"Draw your own conclusions. Natives don't go near the League headquarters as a rule, do they?"

"No."

"And the League, of course, will want to know about the suicides?"

"Yes, but—"

"But nothing," said the radio voice, which belonged to the only other Denebian currently on Ophiuchus IX. "We can assume this native is a spy. For the League, Orkap."

"All right. I don't see any need to worry, though."

"Don't you? The gurus, like the other natives, can sham, but they can't lie. Sooner or later a guru will be brought out of trance by the League, questioned, and—"

"Tell them about us?" Orkap asked in a shocked voice.

"It could happen. Maybe it's happened already. There won't be any proof, of course, but the League would

send a spy. Suppose I describe this native to you."

Orkap said, "Go ahead," and the radio voice did so.

In a shocked voice Orkap admitted: "I've given that Ophiuchan a pilot's job this morning. There can't be any doubt about it."

"Ah, then you see? You see?"

"I can fix that. I can—"

"Orkap, Orkap. You'll do nothing now. Let the spy alone for now. Then, in the Empty Places, you will merely announce to the pilots that there is a spy among them. Don't reveal who it is." He could not believe his ears.

"But—"

"They want work. They need work. They'll all be afraid the finger of guilt may point at them. They'll work like dogs for you, and I wouldn't be surprised if they uncovered the spy themselves."

"Yes," Orkap said. "Yes, I understand."

"All but one thing, Orkap. There is one thing you don't understand. The spy's identity—"

"You already told me who the spy was."

"Yes. But there is another spy. Working for us, in the League building."

"I never knew," said Orkap.

"The spy among your pilots is more than appearance indicates. Did you ever hear of Johnny Mayhem?"

Orkap's heart jumped into his throat. Who in the galaxy hadn't heard of Mayhem? "But," he gasped, "a—"

"Nevertheless. It is Mayhem."

Orkap was suddenly afraid, more afraid than he had ever been in his life. The ubiquitous Mayhem.

The fierce white sun of Ophiuchus IX broiled down on the Empty Places, a featureless desert two-thousand miles across and as vividly white as bleached bone. In all that burning emptiness, the jet cargo craft looked very small and very insignificant, like black midges on the dead white sand.

Midges among midges, the new pilots walked.

One said: "But I see no cargo."

Another: "These outworlders and their mystery. . . ."

All were sweating, all uncomfortable, but all grateful for the twenty credits a flight they would earn, whatever the cargo turned out to be.

"What do you think?"
Pandit asked Sria.

"I think I've never been so hot in my life. I feel like I'm being broiled alive."

"Here comes the Denebian now."

They had been driven into the Empty Places in a sand sled. The trip had taken two days but because the sled was air-conditioned no one had objected. When they saw the half dozen jets they knew why a sled had taken them into the wilderness. The jets were small cargo-carriers with room for pilot, co-pilot and perhaps a ton of cargo in each. Whatever it was the Denebians wanted exported, it didn't take up much room.

Orkap of Deneb walked toward them past the first of the jets. He began without preamble: "Your cargo is packed and ready to be moved in an underground vault five hundred yards from here. You will break up into pairs, a pilot and co-pilot for each jet." Sria Krishna and Pandit had already paired themselves together. "You work on your own time, getting the cargo with trundle-sleds, loading it, taking off, delivering it to the Denebian freighter at the spaceport. When you are finished, you collect your pay."

"Where do we sleep?"
someone asked.

Orkap smiled. "You didn't come out here to sleep. There is only a limited amount of cargo. The jets are swift. You will be paid according to the amount of work you do. Any other questions?"

"What about food?" a plump young Ophiuchan asked.

"You will be given energy tablets, as many as you wish. Any other questions? No? Good. I have two additional things to say. First, you are not to examine your cargo under any circumstances, either here, or in transit, or on the spacefield. There are televid pick-up units in each jet, so you will be watched at all times. Second—" Orkap paused and let the silence grow and spread across the dazzling white expanse—"there is a spy among you, wearing the body of an Ophiuchan but in reality—well, I don't have to tell you who he is in reality." Orkap smiled grimly. "There is only one body-changer in the galaxy, but one is quite enough."

One of the pilots said, a little breathlessly: "Johnny Mayhem!"

Orkap smiled again. "I am aware of Mayhem's identity,"

he said, "but I'm not going to do anything about it."

The pilots waited. The sun glared down balefully. "You see," Orkap told them, "we cannot be altogether sure that the rest of you are here 'simply to earn your twenty credits a flight. Mayhem has unwittingly become our insurance. Find Mayhem! Find the spy among you! A hundred credits bonus to the man who does!"

Pandit looked at Sria, who whistled. The girl said: "If they think we can finish the job without sleep, picking up cargo and flying it to the spaceport and returning for more, then a hundred credits is probably more than any of us will earn. They'll all be looking like hawks for this Mayhem."

"And," Pandit agreed, "if there's a native spy among them, he'd be afraid to show himself for fear they'll think he's Mayhem. Very clever of the Denebians."

"... to work at once," Orkap was saying. He wore a blaster on his hip, the only weapon among them. They all trudged behind him through the burning, faceless sands. Soon they reached a depression from which the sand had been cleared, bar-

ing the white bedrock of the Empty Places. In the rock a square opening had been cut, shielded on each side from the shifting sands by an up-curving lip. A ramp led down into darkness.

"You will find your cargo down there. Also enough trundle-sleds to go around," Orkap explained. "The cargo is crated. The crates must remain intact. Is that understood?"

It was understood.

Their sudden mutual suspicion a pall worse than the heat, the Ophiuchans descended the ramp. They needed the money or they wouldn't be here. The money meant more to them than anything: this was no time to be far-sighted. Yet one of them was a spy for the Galactic League—Johnny Mayhem.

One of them, but which?

Pandit made a quick estimate of the number of crates. They were stacked neatly against one wall, each about four feet by four by four. And from the size of them, a single crate would fill the cargo bay of each of the jets. Pandit made a rough estimate. Two dozen crates, perhaps. In the dim light it was hard to tell. Two dozen crates, six jets, twelve Ophiu-

chans. Four trips for each jet. A half hour to load, ten minutes to unload, an hour and a half by jet to the spacefield. Three hours and forty minutes, round trip. Say, four hours. Four times four, sixteen. Sixteen hours of steady work for eighty credits. No time for mystery or suspicion. Barely time for mistrust . . .

"You, there!" a voice called. "What are you doing?"

It was one of the other Ophiuchans, quite the biggest of the lot. Pandit had seen him outside and remembered his name. He was Raj Shiva, a tall, muscular, swarthy Ophiuchan, with small, alert, suspicious eyes and a livid scar alongside his jaw.

"Nothing," Pandit said. "Nothing."

"No? The others are loading already. I'll be watching you."

For a hundred credits, Pandit thought furiously, but said nothing. Sria touched his shoulder. "I have one of the trundle-sleds," she said. "Let's get about it."

"Right," said Pandit.

Raj Shiva watched them a few moments longer, then drifted away with his own partner. It took Pandit and Sria, sweating copiously in the tremendous heat, a few

minutes less than half an hour to load one of the crates aboard their jet. Three of the other ships were already airborne, whining away toward the spacefield.

Pandit looked at the crate. There were no markings on it anywhere. The wood looked new, but that meant absolutely nothing. In the dry heat of the Empty Places, wood would last a century, a millennium. They could not tell how old it was.

"Ready?" Sria Krishna called from the controls.

Pandit had secured the crate in the cargo bay. "Ready," he responded.

Moments later acceleration thrust them back in the twin pilot seats.

Sria leveled the jet at twenty thousand and they sped at eight hundred miles an hour toward the city and the spacefield just beyond it.

"Do you wonder about it?" Sria asked after a while.

"About what?"

"The cargo."

"We aren't supposed to."

"I know." Sria laughed. "I'm a woman, you see."

Pandit grinned at her. "Curiosity," he said. "A woman's trait on any world."

Sria got up from the pilot chair but Pandit placed his

hand on her shoulder and gently shoved her down again. "They have a televid unit aboard," he said, "remember?"

Sria nodded. The jet sped on.

They landed at the spacefield. They were the fourth jet down and one of the other three had taken off on the return leg of the flight. A Denebian Pandit had never seen before was supervising the loin-cloth garbed laborers loading the crates aboard a Denebian spaceship. With Sria he delivered their crate on the trundle-sled, returned with the sled to their jet, and took off.

Just short of four hours from the time they started they returned to the Empty Places. They had gained a little time and were the second team down. From the jet ahead of them, Raj Shiva led a puny, middle-aged copilot.

Orkap stood in the underground storage room. Looking at his wrist chrono he said to the four Ophiuchans who came down the ramp: "You made fine time." Raj Shiva's puny companion said something, but Raj Shiva grabbed his arm and they began to load a second crate.

Pandit and Sria loaded theirs in silence.

They made their second round trip in four hours exactly. It was completely dark when they returned to the Empty Places. Sria was worried they would overshoot the cargo point, but Pandit brought the little jet down within a few hundred yards of its takeoff point.

They could see nothing when they shut off the jet's running lights, except for the glow which came from the underground room. They reached it and went down the ramp. Pandit judged that half the crates were gone now. He took a quick tour of the dimly-lit room while Sria got the trundle-sled into position against one of the crates.

"Nobody here," Pandit said in a whisper. "The Denebian must be sleeping in the sand-sled."

"Yes," Sria said a little breathlessly.

"I was thinking—"

"What?" Sria said. "Don't stop."

"If we wanted to examine one of the boxes, it would be suicide to open the one we take. But we could open one of them down here, see what it is, take another for ourselves—"

"You would do this?" Sria asked him. "Why?"

Pandit shrugged. "I have eyes," he said. "Our gurus did not broadcast the death-wish to outworlders until the Denebians came. Then they started. Have the Denebians sold them on the idea?"

"I don't know," Sria said.

"Well, let's assume they have. Why? Why would they do such a thing, Sria?"

"Let me get this straight, Pandit. First, you think the gurus actually are making the outworlders kill themselves?"

"Of course," Pandit said. "It's mental suggestion, on a scale only our gurus are capable of. But don't you see, Sria, they wouldn't do it on their own. The gurus are dirty, careless about their bodies—but terribly arrogant. Left alone, they wouldn't think the outworlders important enough to be concerned over one way or another. They certainly wouldn't kill them."

"Go on," Sria urged.

"All right. The gurus have great knowledge of the mystical, but externally they're naive. Let's suppose someone came along—the Denebians in this case—and found something they wanted very

badly on Ophiuchus. These crates here, Sria. What would they do? They'd go to the gurus and convince them—it wouldn't be difficult—that any intercourse with outworlders would be harmful to Ophiuchus, that the outworlders want to colonize and exploit our world, that sort of thing. While the gurus are stewing it over, the Denebians could have prepared this shipment here—whatever it is—for departure. But the gurus, too well convinced by them, could have acted sooner than they expected, making it all but impossible for the small handful of outworlders, the Denebians among them, to go abroad without fear of taking their own lives. Perhaps a few, like Orkap and that other Denebian, are not at all suicide-prone. Perhaps a few can withstand it. As for the rest, it's indoors and away from the mental influence of the gurus, or off Ophiuchus entirely. Which would leave the Denebians with a problem they hadn't thought of." His words made sense.

"Yes!" cried Sria excitedly. "Now that they have their valuable cargo ready to go, how can they get it off Ophiuchus without help?"

"We," said Pandit softly, "are that help."

Sria asked: "What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. I honestly don't. I never had anything against the outworlders. How could I? We're all progeny of outworlders who came here almost five hundred years ago from a place called India on Earth. But the gurus—"

"—have been deceived. You said so yourself."

Pandit was sweating, and it was more than the heat which made him sweat. He paced up to the crates, then back again, then to the crates. Suddenly he said, "All right. All right, I'll do it. Someone's got to find out what the Denebians want here."

And Pandit began to pry at one of the boxes with a knife he carried in his loin cloth. Sria said, "I'll keep watch. You call me when it's opened."

"Maybe you ought to get out of here. In case anything happens, I don't want to get you involved."

But Sria went up the ramp and crouched there, waiting, watching. The desert was very quiet, entirely windless, and hot even at night. Stars sprinkled the sky overhead

and far off she thought she heard the distant whine of a jet. "Hurry," she called. From below she heard the sound of wood being pried away from wood. She heard, or imagined she heard, the jet coming closer. "Hurry!" she called softly.

Finally three words drifted up to her. "Come here, Sria." She felt a little relieved. Now that he'd finished.

She listened for the jet. Now she heard nothing. She went swiftly down the ramp.

Pandit stood before one of the crates, perspiring freely. He had pried loose one of the side walls and a smooth metal surface with stenciled lettering on it was exposed.

He said: "I can't read that. It's a language I never saw before."

Sria bent closer and looked at the stenciled lettering. A voice, not Pandit's, said:

"I thought it would be you two . . . No, don't move!"

A big muscular figure silhouetted against the starlight, and a smaller, puny, thin-legged figure. Raj Shiva and his co-pilot.

"A hundred credits each, Handus," Raj Shiva said as he ran down the ramp. "Can you keep the girl from getting away?"

Handus rushed down at his heels.

Pandit met Raj Shiva at the foot of the ramp. Pandit was a big man by Ophiuchan standards, but Raj Shiva was bigger. "Run, Sria!" Pandit cried, and met the giant with his knife.

Raj Shiva parried the blow with his forearm, then his big hands moved swiftly and the knife clattered to the floor. Sria ran for the ramp, her bare feet padding swiftly against the stone floor. Handus was waiting for her at the foot of the ramp in an awkward crouch. She had a glimpse of Raj Shiva and Pandit straining together, then Handus struck her with his balled fist. It was a puny blow, but Sria staggered back, her jaw numb. Laughing shrilly, Handus leaped at her. She was shoved back, tripped over something, and fell. For a moment all the lights blinked out inside her head.

Inside—no! Raj Shiva and Pandit stumbled about the room, struck something, there was a loud popping sound, a tinkling, and the lights in the storage room went out.

"Where is she?" Handus called. "I can't find her!"

She heard him groping

about, heard the other struggling together. She got to her feet and stood perfectly still, waiting for anything. She wished she had a weapon—something—she was only a woman—

Then a voice whispered: "Hurry, Sria! Hurry!"

"Pandit?"

He took her arm in the darkness. She couldn't see him. They went to the crates and wrestled one on their trundle-sled.

"Not the open one?" Sria gasped.

"No. No."

They heard footsteps . . . Saw a figure for a moment silhouetted against starlight. Handus was fleeing, probably for help.

They took their sled out into the night and dragged it across the sand toward their waiting jet. They loaded the crate in the cargo bay. While Pandit was finishing the job in the darkness, Sria sat down at the controls.

"Ready?" she shouted above the whine of the jets.

Pandit said that he was. She hardly heard his voice.

A moment later, she took the small cargo jet up.

She heard Pandit moving in the small cabin behind her. She said: "We ought to

take it to the League authorities, don't you think?" She had to shout to be heard above the whining roar of the jets.

"Why?"

"I was able to read the writing. It's Procyonian, Pandit. Do you know anything about the Procyonians?"

"Well, a few centuries ago, they were the most warlike people in the galaxy. It was rumored they had a cache of thermonuclear bombs hidden somewhere, after such weapons were outlawed in the twenty-fifth century. The cache was never found, until tonight. We found it, Pandit."

"But Orkap and—"

"That's true. It was found by the Denebians first. Don't you see, Pandit? Orkap and the others, private Denebian traders. It wasn't the government. It never is the government these days. But unscrupulous individuals, Pandit, armed with two dozen hydrogen bombs—why, they could take over their own world on threat of imminent destruction, or some outworld plum they had their eye on, or—"

"I see." Pandit's voice was barely audible above the whine of the jets.

"It's a job the Galactic League can handle," Sria went on. "Now that it's out in the open—or will be as soon as we get to the spacefield. You've done your work, Pandit, and your people won't forget you for it. As for me, my work here is finished too."

"Your work?"

Above the roar of the jet, Sria shouted: "Yes. I am Johnny Mayhem." She smiled in the darkness. Johnny Mayhem, she thought, in a girl's body. Well, he'd been young men and old, weak and strong, sick and healthy, human and alien outworlder—so why not a girl too?

All at once Pandit's hand lay heavily on her shoulder. She turned around and in the darkness but with the lights of the instrument board on it saw the gleam of a knife blade. The face beyond the blade, leering from darkness, was not Pandit's. She hadn't actually known it was Pandit. She hadn't seen him. She'd hardly been able to hear his voice.

It was Raj Shiva.

"Fly us to Denebian Exports," he said, "or I'll kill you and do it myself."

"You're making a mistake. Your people belong with the

Galactic League, not with a handful of adventurers who—"

"The Denebians are right," Raj Shiva said fanatically. "My people would be better off left alone."

"I'm flying this jet to the spaceport—and the League."

"I'll kill you. I know all about you, Mayhem. You're not a woman, really. You're not even a native. That's a dead body, isn't it? But if I kill it—again—while you're in it, you die to. You'll do what I say!"

This very night, unless something was done about it, the cache of thermonuclear weapons would be space-bound, the first hydrogen bombs loose in the galaxy for almost five hundred years. Wouldn't mankind ever begin to learn? Mayhem-Sria thought wearily. He knew the answer, of course: most men would, but the few who refused could bring destruction to an entire galaxy. . . .

Moments before, apparent success of a mission. Now, failure. Or death. Or both.

Sria's hand flashed out suddenly and struck the instrument board. The jet plummeted earthward with a loud whining sound. Sria felt herself shoved back by

the tremendous acceleration into the cushions of the pilot chair. She heard a wild exclamation from Raj Shiva, but couldn't turn around to see what had happened. Grim-lipped, she kept the ship hurtling Earthward. She knew it was dangerous and might even prove disastrous. Her body could take so much, then she would black out. But if she didn't maintain the dive until the last possible instant, Raj Shiva would get control of the ship and its vital cargo. She was only a girl, but she was protected by the crash-padding of the pilot chair. Raj Shiva, unprotected, was behind her somewhere. . . .

Down through the thin upper atmosphere of Ophiuchus IX screamed the small ship, its heat-dial blinking on and off in warning as friction scorched its thin shell. The scream of air became more deep-throated as the atmosphere became thicker. . . .

Ten thousand feet.

Eight thousand.

Six.

Sria's eyes saw black. Her breath was labored. Needles of pain darted in her skull, plucked at her eyes. She opened her mouth to scream but heard nothing. She felt as if she must be forced clear

through the protective cushions of the pilot chair.

Five thousand feet.

Four thousand.

Blackness and peace and a settling lassitude. . . .

Three thousand feet.

With hands that would barely function, Sria with supreme effort brought the jet out of its death-dive. She slumped in the pilot chair for a long time, too weak to do anything else.

Then she looked back at Raj Shiva.

Who lay slack and unconscious against the rear bulkhead of the cargo ship.

Mayhem-Sria brought the jet down and, middle of the night or no, saw Kovandawamy. Raj Shiva was taken into custody. A jet was sent out, loaded with Leaguemen who had proved immune to the guru death-wish and all armed to the teeth. It landed at the cache and stood guard over it. Pandit was found, unconscious, one of his arms broken, but otherwise all right. A second jet prevented the Denebian Export ship from blasting off with the

hydrogen bombs already loaded. Orkap and his companion were taken into custody.

The rest, of course, is history. The gurus of Ophiuchus IX were shown what had been taking place in the name of friendship between themselves and Deneb and in the name of isolation. Most of the gurus retired entirely from active life. The few who did not spent the rest of their days working for cooperation between Ophiuchus and the rest of the Galactic League. Orkap and his companion were sent back to Deneb for punishment.

Two weeks later, Kovandawamy shook Sria's hand.

"A girl," he said. "You did it as a girl. I still can't believe it. But then, of such stuff is the Mayhem legend made."

Mayhem smiled. Already the Hub had a new assignment for him. He could feel the old excitement, the wonder, stirring him. He smiled again and told Kovandawamy: "Better not tell that fellow Pandit. I think he had a crush on Sria."

THE END

Test Your I. Q.

Although the English are known for dropping their H's when speaking, there are words used by Americans beginning with "H" which is never pronounced. Listed below are 10 commonly known words and phrases, including some borrowed ones, in which the initial "H" is dropped. How many can you identify by properly filling in the blanks to the given definitions?

A person who drops his H's with forethought should be able to identify at least 8 words and phrases. (Answers page 122)

1. — — — — — : Upright; faithful.
2. — — — — : A plant that possesses medicinal properties.
3. — — — — : One who inherits property after the death of its owner.
4. — — — — — — — — — — : Disabled and not in condition to fight.
5. — — — — — : A title of respect.
6. — — — — : An appointed time.
7. — — — — — — — — : A personal valuable that descends to a successor.
8. — — — — — — — : A pasture.
9. — — — — — — — — — — : A relish; an appetizer.
10. — — — — — — — — — — : A voluntary fee for professional services.



We know you're a science-fiction fan but maybe you have other interests too; perhaps you collect stamps—or zebra stripes—or maybe just pretty girls—pictures of 'em that is. Anyhow, whatever your hobby, the Space Club is for you. There are no end of fascinating people slated for future issues. In fact we've got everybody in but YOU. Now seriously—what are you waiting for? Send in your name and get ready for a flood of letters.

BEATRICE BERTUZZI, C/O COMPAGNIA NAZIONALE ARTIGIANA VIZ GUICCIARDINI 9, FLORENCE, ITALY . . . Foreign fan issuing SOS for s-f literature. Wants readers to write to her.

MRS. H. B. BRAUN, 129 DANIEL ST., PORTSMOUTH, N. H. . . . H. is 32 years old, 5'8", 158 pounds, brown hair, green eyes. Would like to hear from other women readers of s-f.

A/1C W. H. BURKE, 5039 FD. SR. SQ., APO 942 SEATTLE, WASH. . . . W. H. desires to exchange his ideas with other s-f readers.

PAUL S. BUTCHER, JR., 1833 JUNEWAY TERRACE, CHICAGO 26, ILL. . . . Paul is a 23-year-old ex-navy man, who is an avid s-f read-

er. He dabbles a bit in writing, music composition. Has appeared in a few amateur productions of plays, musicals, "G. & S." operettas.

RICARDO de la CAMPANA, 1607 HARDESTY, KANSAS CITY, MO. . . . Reading the science-fiction magazines has helped 23-year-old Ricardo learn English. He is very interested in hearing from other avid readers.

ELYNOR CASSINELLI, 1039 WATT ST., RENO, NEV. . . . Elynor is an avid science-fiction reader. Her interests are philately and astronomy.

TOM ELY, 13921 ARCHWOOD ST., VAN NUYS, CALIF. . . . Tom is a 15-year-old student at Van Nuys High School. Hobbies are s-f tales,

chemistry, astronomy, stamp collecting.

MRS. EILEEN HINES, 65 FRANKLIN ST., VALPARAISO, IND. . . . Eileen, a 39-year-old widow, would like very much to hear from other avid science-fiction readers. Her only enjoyment these days is s-f tales.

LEROY HOFFEE, 1414 MANOR S. W., CANTON 10, OHIO . . . 16-year-old Leroy is in the process of collecting for his science-fiction library. Is interested in flying saucers, astronomy. Hopes to be a chemist in the future.

DURAN B. JENKINS, 2016TH AACS SQD. BOX 254, DOVER AFB, DOVER, DELAWARE . . . Radar technician, age 23, Hobbies: Chess, camping, exploring, science fiction.

LOIS JONES, 1748 HWY. 1, WATSONVILLE, CALIF. . . . 18-year-old Lois would like to hear from other s-f fans who like s-f tales and good novels. She also enjoys music, writing.

LINWOOD KEMP, 150 WEST ST., WILMINGTON, MASS. . . . Lin is 15 years old, blond hair, blue eyes. Ambition is to be a fiction writer. Desires to write to other s-f fans.

LALE MIMAROGLU, NISANTAS-IHLAMUR YOLU G., ISTANBUL, TURKEY . . . Lale is a 19-year-old s-f fan, who enjoys ham radio, decoration, dancing.

MRS. WM. PACHECO, 670 MADRID ST., SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. . . . 23 years old. Housewife, has 2 pre-school children. Married to a police officer. Hobbies: Cooking, reading. Would like to hear from s-f fans around the world.

BILL RICHESON, 404 PARK AVE., TARBORO, N. C. . . . Bill

works as an engineer, announcer on WCPS. 23 years old, brown hair, brown eyes. Main interests are music, electronics, s-f reading, stamp collecting, records. Likes red-headed gals.

DAVID JON ROACH, 11109 E. 23RD ST., INDEPENDENCE, MO. . . . 14 years old, David is a member of the science-fiction book club and collects stamps as a hobby. He has approximately 100 books in his own science-fiction library.

WAYNE ROBERTS, 1725 JENNIFER, HOUSTON 29, TEX. . . . 15 years old, Wayne would like to hear from other fans. Main hobby is astronomy. Also enjoys s-f and stamp collecting.

RAY ROGERS, 315 WEST 56TH ST., HIALEAH, FLA. . . . Ray wants to meet some other science-fiction fans. He is 15 years old. His other interests include science and chess.

STEPHEN SALA, BOX 1, OSBURN, IDAHO . . . 15-year-old Stephen has many hobbies: astronomy, reading s-f, stamp collecting, fooling with the radio. He likes to play chess and would enjoy playing it by mail.

R. SCHAEFFER, TOLSTRAAT, 48, 3RD FLOOR, AMSTERDAM, HOLLAND . . . 19 years old, R. has been buying up the limited supply of s-f magazines in Holland. Through his adventures in s-f he has become interested in astronomy, astronautics, rocket engineering. Reads English very well.

A2/C DURAN B. SENKINS, 2016TH AACS SQD. BOX 254, DOVER AFB, DOVER, DEL. . . . Duran is a radar technician. Likes s-f, chess (3-D), all phases of science, exploring.

JAMES SHAW, 313 N. BROAD ST., SHENANDOAH, IOWA . . . 28 years old, James' favorite hobby is reading and writing all kinds of

fiction. Hopes to receive lots of letters.

GEORGE SIEVERS, GREER SCHOOL, HOPE FARM, N. Y.... 15 years old, George is interested in almost anything that has to do with science, especially nuclear physics. S-f is his hobby.

GUNTIS SMILGA, 5019 BARKWILL AVE., CLEVELAND 27, OHIO . . . 12 years old, Guntis is an avid follower of s-f. Hopes to hear from other young enthusiasts.

NANCY A. SMITH, 226 WEST 13TH ST., NEW YORK 11, N. Y. . . . Has been an avid s-f fan for quite some time and will be until the tales are no longer fiction but fact.

ROBERT T. STONE, 10717 E. 27TH TERR., INDEPENDENCE, MO. . . . Robert has been a member of the science-fiction book club since 1955. 14 years old. Interested in UFOs.

A/2C VERNON STREHL, HQ. SQ., 17TH A.B.C., BOX F15, EGLIN AUX., FLA. 9, FLA. . . . Vernon has been using *Amazing* and other s-f magazines as a sort of second Bible for the last half of his 22 years. He is 6'2", has dark brown hair, brown eyes.

GENNIE SUMMERS, 5157 AMES AVE., OMAHA 4, NEBR. . . . Gennie has built a spaceship club-

house where neighborhood kids gather after school for space games, tales of space travel, strange planets. She collects scientific data.

JANEEN SUTTON, 427 N. E. ROSELAWN, PORTLAND 11, ORE. . . . Janeen is interested in hearing from other young people around 13 years old who are avid s-f readers.

JOSEPH TEKETE, JR., COOLEY RD., R.F.D. #2, GRAFTON, OHIO . . . Joe is 15 years old and would like to hear from other young people interested in science fiction.

ROBERT DEL VALLEE, BOX 711, MENARD, ILL. . . . A musician (saxophonist), 29 years old, Robert also enjoys science-fiction.

RICHARD J. WALTERS, 5384 CORNWALL DR., DAYTON 5, OHIO . . . 13 years old, Richard is interested in astronomy, amateur telescope making, music. He likes science fiction immensely.

ERIC JAMES WEAVER, 22 SOUTH EDWARDS HALL, PRINCETON, N. J. . . . 18 years old, Eric is a junior at Princeton University. He is majoring in religion and English. He is very interested in astronomy and UFOs.

STEVE WELSH, BLUE RIVER, WIS. . . . 17 years old, Steve is a senior at Blue River High School. He likes all types of science fiction.

ANSWERS TO TEST YOUR I.Q.

ANSWERS: 1—Honest; 2—Herb; 3—Heir; 4—Hors de combat; 5—Honor; 6—Hour; 7—Heirloom; 8—Herbage; 9—Hors d'oeuvres; 10—Honorarium.

Amazing But True . . .

It's impossible to catch a cold from a cat or other animal. Only man and monkeys can transmit the cold virus.

In Greece, the traditional "Scary Hour" is not midnight, but noon.



Edgar Bergen reports that ventriloquism is an ancient art, which was practiced already by the old Greeks and Egyptians.

Do you know how our pussycat came into being? According to an old Arabian myth, that is? When one of the lions in Noah's Ark sneezed, a cat jumped out of its nose.

The FBI's list of "Ten Most Wanted Criminals" has never contained the name of a woman.



There is only one musical number, so far, that begins with an apostrophe: "'s Wonderful."

Thanks to John Wagner & Son, a Philadelphia spice company, who has unearthed old flower and spice recipes, you can now enjoy such dishes as Emperor Charlemagne's favorites: pickled rosebuds, violet fritters and lavender aspic. There are also other delights that the Holy Roman Emperor probably missed: Scrambled eggs with marigolds, chrysanthemum salad, a marigold-liverwurst sandwich and a rose-petal parfait.



The first coin authorized by the United States was the "Fugio" cent of 1787 which carries the meaningful inscription: "Mind Your Business."

We doubt that you've ever wondered why natives in the Fiji Islands don't operate stores. But just in case you have, here's the reason: Local custom requires any member of the family to let other members walk into his house and take anything they may want—and vice versa, he has the same privilege. Naturally, you can't run a store that way!

PAUL STEINER



BY THE READERS

Dear Ed:

Have just finished your mag. and have started doing some studying. I took Space I.Q. quiz, and is my head hung low. Most of the questions were beyond me. I thought I knew quite a bit about science fiction but I've changed my mind.

Why don't you make a book of the cartoons appearing in your mag? I, for one, would be willing to shell out the ole dough for a humorous book like that. Furthermore I don't think I'd be the only one.

I was sitting at my desk thinking very profoundly about all the different time travel theories when I came up with this stumper: First, Professor (We'll call him X) invents a time travel machine, then he goes back into time and while there disrupts the time line. Now, by disrupting the time line he will cancel out the time line he is living in. Ergo, he does not live. Well, if he doesn't live, the time line could not have been disrupted, and he would be living still. (That is if you are still with me)? Could this be a vicious circle? Because if he is still living, then he could disrupt the time line again? Now I am thoroughly mixed up. Could anybody straighten this out for me?

Joseph Anderson
283 Malden St.
Rochester, N. Y.

• *Indeed it is a vicious circle, going back to the imponderable problem: I went back into space and murdered my grand-*

father. In doing so, did I also murder myself? Or, having made myself non-existent, was I able to murder myself? Or, not being there in the second place, could I have gone back in the first place?

Dear Ed:

I especially like "Or So You Say." I like to see what other fans think.

I saw in your November issue quite a few mentions, both honorable and other-wise, of the "Shaver Mysteries." I'm a considerably new fan to *Amazing Stories*. I've just been reading regularly for a few months. I think you had better clear up, in my mind, and the minds of other new fans, what the "Shaver Mysteries" are.

Richard Brown
127 Roberts St.
Pasadena, Calif.

• *For information on the Shaver mystery, we must refer you to Ray Palmer of Amherst, Wisconsin. It was his baby.*

Dear Ed:

Finished the December issue of the great one and only—*Amazing Stories*. Great issue. All the stories were swell especially "The Galaxy Master." As usual the varied departments were interesting.

Enjoyed—"Test Your Space I.Q.," I passed. Let's have another soon in order to keep us future "Spacemen" on our toes.

The Space Club is paying off. Received letters from all over. We should have done it long ago.

The guest editorial by Hal Annas was the truest statement ever said. Especially his last paragraph. That's the answer to future events.

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N. 1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

• *We think the I.Q. feature will be quite a thing. There are some real cuties scheduled for future issues. In a couple of years any one of our readers will be able to put the big quiz*

shows out of business. We have big plans for the Space Club, too.

Dear Editor:

I am sick of hearing the praises of "A World Called Crimson." Here's why:

At the beginning, one of the first things our young friends create is an elevator. Later, when our hero has to get up a cliff which is "almost perpendicular," in order to save Robin's life, he does it the hard way. Why doesn't he create a stick already properly hardened, instead of going to all that trouble when time is so precious? Also, it is doubtful that they were together all the time that they lived there. Think this over: If merely thinking about something caused its creation, what would happen when one of them found something and wished the other were there to see it?

No, I couldn't swallow that story. However, most of your stories are very good.

In the October issue the first four were tops. For November, I liked "The Idiot" the best, in spite of its brevity. As for the December issue, I haven't had time to read much of it yet, but it looks very promising. Keep up the good work, but leave stories such as "A World Called Crimson" and "Gnomebody" for F & S-F or *Fantastic*.

Mrs. R. F. Renslear
739 Bigham
Pontiac, Mich.

• *We liked "The Idiot" also, Mrs. Renslear, but darn it, we liked "A World Called Crimson," too. We have a feeling that if our hero could read your letter, he'd say, "Darn! Why didn't I think of that?"*

Dear Editor:

I started to read *Amazing* when I bought the December issue. Since then I haven't missed an issue. I was fourteen in November and I have been reading S-F since I was ten.

In relation to the January issue this is the way I rate the stories.

Number one is "Before Egypt." Next would be "Reluctant Genius." This was pretty good with an ending that fitted

into the story quite nicely. Last is a tie between "Heart" and "Savage Wind." The reason they tie is because they both have the same kind of plot. Maybe one should have been saved for a future issue.

I prefer stories about mutants, robotics, and robots. I'd also like more Johnny Mayhem stories and possibly a story by Arthur C. Clarke.

Anxiously waiting for the first issue of *Dream World*.

Stuart Buchalter

50-12 204 St.

Bayside 64, N. Y.

• *It's wonderful to be able to grant a reader's request almost before he makes it. There is a rip-roaring Johnny Mayhem yarn in this issue. That guy Mayhem! He's so blasted busy we can't make him stand still long enough to give us his autograph.*

Dear Ed:

I would like to mention that I consider Valigurskys' artwork monotonous and uninspired. Your color process doesn't help either. I'll make my point by asking you to compare these covers: *F* Dec. '55, *F* Dec. '56, *AS* Aug. '56: the utter monotony of your endangered men. Interiors are fair. Why not try some other artists from time to time?

I suspect I'm not going to like *Dream World*, if your special issues of *Fantastic* are illustrative. Such stories are for the kiddies and completely frustrated neurotics. Unless genuinely funny, they are not even fun to read.

Dainis Bisenieks

303 Hinsdale H., E.Q.

Ann Arbor, Mich.

• *You're a tough customer, Dainis, but we aren't discouraged. We're going to keep right on hitting the line month after month and one of these days we're going to make you say: "Golly! I liked that!"*

Dear Ed:

In reference to Page 108 answer No. 6 of question No. 6 in the December issue, *Amazing Stories*: It's true—that's cor-

...OR SO YOU SAY

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rect, but nitrogen does not have the atomic number of 6. Carbon has the Atomic number of 6 with an atomic wt. of 12.011 (average including isotopes.) Nitrogen has an atomic number of 7 with an average atomic wt. of 14.008. Undoubtedly you must have confused nitrogen with carbon. Also, kelvin absolute is not 272° below 0° centigrade but 273.16° below centigrade.

Robert Sigmund Goldner
T.K.E.
Gettysburg, Pa.

• *You're right on all counts and we're embarrassed. Any science-fiction editor who gets his nitrogen mixed up with his carbon ought to be sentenced to five years on a love story magazine.*

Dear Editor:

I really liked the "Galaxy Master." It was one of the best novels in *Amazing Stories*. The only thing I could find wrong with the December issue was the front cover.

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

• *Mr. Ayers, don't do that to us! What was wrong with the front cover? Tell us! As it is, we'll lose sleep and bite our nails to the elbow while you sit back there giggling.*

Dear Editor:

The December issue was terrific. "Repeat Broadcast" by Slesar gave me a good laugh. I'm hoping for some more of his humorous stories. The only stories I disliked was "Tracking Level" by Ellison, but I guess I just don't like bad endings. The suggestions I would like to make are: eliminate one or more stories and make the first one longer, and have your covers more on the fantastic side.

Glory Zeidman
142-21 26 Ave.
Flushing 54, N. Y.

• *If you like fantasy covers, keep an eye out for Dream*

World. And after you buy it and frame the cover for your living room wall, sit ye down and read the stories. You're in for a treat.

Dear Ed:

I have just gone through the pages of my first issue of *Amazing*. I was very pleasantly surprised. The story I enjoyed the most was "The Idiot." It's certainly a story that leaves you thinking.

I was wondering why you don't have a story rating section. I've always found it interesting to check my ratings with those of other fans.

Lois Jones
1748 Hwy.
Wakonville, Calif.

• *At one time Amazing did have a story-rating section. Reviving it might be a good idea.*

Dear Editor:

I have been an s-f fan for almost five years. I must say I enjoyed the stories in the December "ish" very much. "The Galaxy Master" and "Marriages Are Made In Detroit," I thought, were the best. "Death to the Earthmen" was also very good. I especially liked its time travel twist. I have come to expect stories of extremely high-caliber in *Amazing* and I have not been disappointed as yet. Keep it up.

Paul S. Butcher, Jr.
1833 Juneway Terrace
Chicago 26, Ill.

• *Five years? Why, you're just a newcomer, Paul. Think of all the pleasant years that lie ahead of you!*

Dear Ed:

About the December '56 issue of *Amazing*, somebody goofed. Who did the research for your I.Q. column? E MC is not a key for anything that I know of. The equation you probably were thinking of was $E = MC^2$ —the little 2 makes all the difference. The velocity of light is 186,000 m.p.s. When you

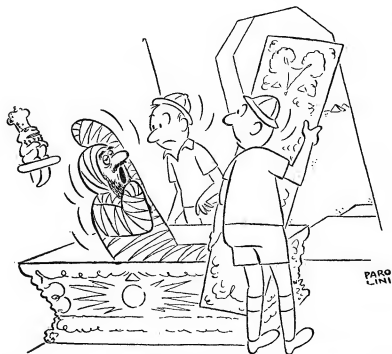
...OR SO YOU SAY

square that like the equation says to C^2 , you get 34,596,000, which is a much larger number.

Although I thought "The Great Kladnar Race" was very bad, "Marriages Are Made In Detroit" with that new twist was excellent.

Fredrick M. Smith
501 East Ave.
Rochester, N. Y.

• *That tiny little 2 that should have been over the big C didn't get into the book but it's sure in our hair. The surprising thing is that every reader we've got wrote, wired, or phoned about it except one man in Arapahoe, Nebr. And the only reason he missed it was that he buys the book for a friend—doesn't read it himself. The friend caught it, though.*



"I must have dozed off!"

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own office! Here's a taut and terrifying tale about a new mental disease that will jolt you!

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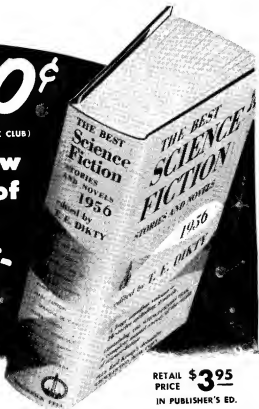
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writing, but also the best factual scientific reports of special interest to science-fiction fans. For example, Club selections have recently included such exciting non-fiction books as *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, *The Viking Rocket Story*, and *Exploring Mars*, as well as outstanding new fiction novels such as *The Power*, *The City and the Stars*, and *Earthman, Come Home*. As a member you are offered these fine books for only \$1 each, though the publishers' prices range up to \$4.00! Why not join now, while you can get this thrilling new volume for only ten cents!

Just a Few of the Exciting Stories in This Big New Anthology

THE MAN WHO ALWAYS KNEW, by *Algis Budrys*—McMahon is always coming up with marvelous ideas—yet never invents anything himself. He just knows when others are about to invent something good—and is on the spot when they do!

YOU CREATED US, by *Tom Godwin*—He has tracked the hideous beasts to their lair. And now he finds that their powerful minds can control his. They plan to take over the world, raising people for food!

SWENSON, DISPATCHER, by *R. DeWitt Miller*—The affairs of Acme Interplan-



etary Express are in sad shape when Swenson takes over. Then the dark voids of space crackle with his crisp orders as he barks the powerful competition with his lightning-like maneuvers!

THE CYBER AND JUSTICE HOLMES, by *Frank Riley*—Will electronic machines that uncannily weigh legal evidence take the place of living judges on the bench? Here's a provocative story about a human judge who is put on trial, pitted against an infallible mechanical wizard.

—and MORE! See other
side for further details